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# A war of frustration: Saddam Hussein's use of nerve gas on civilians at Halabja (1988) and the American response

Christopher Huber

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A War of Frustration: Saddam Hussein's Use of Nerve Gas on Civilians at Halabja (1988) and  
the American Response

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An Honors College Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Arts and Letters  
James Madison University

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by Christopher Brian Huber

May 2019

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of History, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College

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A War of Frustration: Saddam Hussein's Use of Nerve Gas on Civilians at Halabja (1988) and  
the American Response

Christopher Huber

Dr. Raymond Hyser

Spring 2019

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## PREFACE

I will not lie to you. A sixty-page thesis requirement for graduation from the James Madison University Honors College seemed incredibly daunting just one year ago. I struggled to believe I would find the time or the desire to complete this project, nor did I believe I would find a topic so interesting I would meet the minimum page requirement. Now here I sit, just days from graduation, with a published thesis whose completion I doubted more than once, but whose submission brings me much happiness and pride.

Last spring, I searched my brain for topics I found intriguing and with which I could spend the next twelve months researching and writing about. I presented a shortened list to Dr. Hyser who in turn kindly, but very smartly, turned them away, predicting my topics would be either too narrow with too little existing research, too broad with too many sources to sift through, or simply too mundane that I would lose interest over the summer. In hindsight, I thank him for his harsh, but much needed and much appreciated comments during our spring meetings.

As a result, I returned home to my apartment back at square one. I simply opened my computer and searched “US controversies” to see if anything of interest would spark fresh ideas and lead to a new research trail I could hop on. The role of the United States in the modern Middle East naturally appeared as one of the common themes throughout the lists of controversial United States’ events and as I dug deeper I learned of the origins of our relationship with Iraq in the 1980s. I knew absolutely nothing about the Iran-Iraq War at this point, but quickly learned of Saddam Hussein’s infamous use of chemical weapons during the conflict. The attack on Halabja was mentioned in every article I read and headlined most of my search results. I was stunned to hear about the genocide, and appalled after seeing some of the

photographs taken prior to the removal of the bodies from the town. The event had caught my attention and was enough to encourage me to complete the project proposal due that same week. I had barely hit my first deadline and was already prepared to take some time off from the thesis and enjoy my last summer of college.

As a third-year cadet in Army ROTC at James Madison University I attended training at Fort Knox, Kentucky that summer. Part of that training takes place in a simulated toxic environment where cadets are evaluated on their ability to properly put on Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) Gear to protect themselves in a CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear) setting. Once properly equipped, cadets are sent through the gas chamber where they are exposed to tear gas. We were first asked to partially unzip our jacket and uncover our necks so we could feel the tingling, burning sensation as the gas settles on open skin. At this point, I could still breathe normally, as my gas mask was tightly fitted around my face. We were then taken one by one with an experienced instructor who had us remove our gas masks; state our name, rank, and birthday; and sing our favorite song. I made it through half of the chorus of Katy Perry's "Firework" before I could no longer speak, breathe, or see. My eyes burned and watered more than they ever had before. My mouth and nose dripped with drool and snot as my sinuses discharged anything they could find in an attempt to expel the gas from my airways. I had completed this same event and walked through this same chamber two years prior at a similar training course, but this year was different. At this point during my first experience I had been escorted from the chamber and allowed outside where five minutes of clean air, disciplined breathing, and consistent flapping of my arms to prevent the rubbing of my eyes were all I needed to recover. This summer, however, we were ordered to sing our song until the instructor allowed us to again don our gas masks. I underestimated the fear that would race through my

body as I tried to clear the air out of my lungs and my mask. The thirty seconds it took me to clear out the gas and allow the filter to work again felt like minutes, and it was one of the few times in my life where I have felt true panic. All you want to do in that situation is keep breathing in hopes that you will take in fresh air, but only end up breathing in more contaminated air. Instead, you are required to exhale through your mask to clear out the gas and then breathe in and let the filter offer you the oxygen your body needs. You must trust your equipment rather than your natural instinct of hyperventilation.

After each cadet recovered, we again took off our gas masks, went through the painful process of running around the chamber in a circle each crying, spitting, and in my squad-mate's case vomiting, until we were led outside. Even though I had experienced this training two years prior, I was unprepared and had forgotten what it felt like. This time, however, I will not forget. I remember my thought process as I followed my buddies in a circle flapping my arms and blowing out whatever was left in my nose. "This was only tear gas," I recall telling myself. Through the minimal research I had done up to this point I understood tear gas was simply a riot control agent and at the bottom of the list of chemical agents used in war in terms of potency. "If this is the least painful agent, how must people feel when they come into contact with mustard gas or phosgene, or any of the nerve agents I've read about?" I could not even fathom the pain and the panic the people of Halabja must have felt as they realized what had just fallen from the sky on the morning of March 16, 1988. The distance between bodies and the town show the fear some felt as they took flight towards fresh air in the mountains. The bodily contortions illustrate the pain the victims felt as they succumbed to the gas. The huddled masses of parents frivolously attempting to protect their children from the toxic fumes display the futility and



desperation that struck those left in the town. What they wouldn't have done for the equipment I wore as I cried my eyes out over tear gas.

This single life event gave me the motivation to conduct research on these chemical agents and the effects they had on the war and those unlucky enough to fight in it. That gas chamber encouraged me to complete this year-long process and write a thesis that I no longer viewed as a requirement, but rather as a privilege. Though at times, I wished this was a project I had not undertaken, I am thankful to have learned so much and hope that I have been able to give the citizens of Halabja some more of the recognition and justice they deserve. Representing them and the horrifying crises they went through were the initial goal of this monograph. Since then, it has grown into a condemnation of Saddam Hussein, the United States, the United Nations, and the Ayatollah Khomeini and their shared blame for the Anfal Campaign and the Halabja Massacre.

In order to reach this objective, I have broken my thesis into five chapters, each with a new focus. Chapter One explores the history of chemical warfare from its premier usage on a major scale in World War I to its role in the Iran-Iraq War. The development of these weapons and the changing nature of their deployment on the battlefield are evaluated as well as the attempts by the international community to regulate and prohibit chemical warfare throughout the same period. The chapter also highlights the four main types of chemical agents used in war and their effects on the human body.

Throughout the second chapter the historical conflicts between the nations of Iran and Iraq are described in order to provide a cultural backdrop against which the Iran-Iraq war can be understood. The main body of this chapter focuses on the first seven years of the war, examining the war's origins, the global trade networks, the military operations, and the thought processes of

international leaders. In this chapter, the reader will find the initial uses of chemical warfare by Saddam Hussein. This chapter focuses on chemical weapons used against Iranians. The third chapter, on the contrary, focuses on the use of these weapons against the Kurdish population within the northern provinces of Iraq during the Anfal campaigns in 1987 and 1988. The Halabja Massacre and the role of the Kurds in the war are largely discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Four argues the United Nations and the United States failed to effectively denounce the use of poison gas in the war and criticizes the international community for creating an environment in which Saddam Hussein could launch the Anfal campaign without condemnation. It details the multiple UN resolutions passed during the war's eight years and why those resolutions were ineffective. The chapter also explains the debates occurring in the United States government and the reasons behind the decisions it made in regards to Iraq's use of chemical weapons. Finally, the chapter closes by contending the ineffectiveness of the international community and the lack of condemnation or punishment against Iraq for their genocidal Anfal campaign led to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1991. The Epilogue of my thesis wraps up the end of the war and analyzes the first effective role of international commissions in regulating the chemical weapons program in Iraq. It describes the trial and death of Saddam Hussein and explains why the use of chemical weapons in this war differs from previous conflicts.

While this thesis required extensive research it is by no means complete. I regret that I had to meet the deadlines set by the university for there is much more research to be done and much more to write. The myriad accounts of Kurds at Halabja deserve to be heard by the world. This thesis, I hope, offers enough of their voice and condemns those for taking away the voices of their family members, friends, and neighbors. Their sacrifice should not be forgotten.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Above all, I would like to thank Dr. Raymond “Skip” Hyser for a great number of things. Thank you for the research trail you first showed me two years ago, may I never have to use it again. Thank you for assigning John Tosh and his *Pursuit of History* for our research seminar, may I never have to read him again. Thank you for HIST 395 and HIST 310, they were truly two of my favorite courses at JMU. Thank you for your endless support and willingness to embark on this journey with me, God knows I could not have done this without you. Thank you for your flexibility on meetings and deadlines, and for your trust in my ability to produce work that I could be proud of. Thank you for the speed in which you read and provided advice and comments on my thesis as well as for allowing me to shape the big picture while you fine tuned the details. Above all, thank you for your mentorship over the last two and a half years. Your stories, knowledge, and advice for all aspects of life will not be forgotten by myself or the hundreds of other students lucky enough to sign up for your history sections. Your love of learning, teaching, and mentoring are evident and inspire all, even those of us who choose not to pursue higher education in history. I am sure we will keep in touch even after this project is complete.

I would also like to thank Dr. John Butt and Dr. Philip Dillard for their time and effort in reading the drafts of my thesis as well as providing valuable insight and advice for its improvement. Your care and diligence in helping me complete this project provided you with very little, while providing me with much. Your selflessness and willingness to assist those outside of your courses is both admirable and unforgettable.

I would like to thank Candidate Class 01-19 of the James Madison University Ranger Group whose training regiment required every extra minute of free time and ounce of energy I had this semester. Thank you for providing an outlet through which I could step away from writing and stretch my legs. I owe an additional thank you to the boys of 795 Port Republic Road who never grew tired of inquiring about a thesis whose status they knew had not changed in the five minutes since they last asked. Their patience and consistent support through this process was undeniably present and greatly appreciated.

I would further like to thank my parents, Brian and Kathleen, as well as my siblings, Kelleigh and Kevin, for their never-ending support for my work. Their ability to act interested in a topic I discussed far too much over the phone was worthy of an Oscar. My parents raised me to challenge myself, to finish whatever I began, and to take pride in what I accomplished. Their support, motivation, and occasional nagging encouraged me to follow through with and complete the biggest project I have ever attempted. Ninety pages doesn't seem so bad anymore.

Finally, I would like to thank my Grandfather, Richard B. Miller, who is primarily responsible for my love of history and of nature. His passion for history and all it has to offer, and his care for the environment and what the human race can do to it helped inspire me to write this thesis. I hope that it is a topic that incorporates all of his interests and a piece of work of which he would be proud to read. Perhaps it may have ended up on one of the many wall bookshelves I stared up at in awe as a child. This one is for you Dad-Dad.



The Iran-Iraq Border<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joost R. Hiltermann, *A Poisonous Affair: America, Iraq, and the Gassing of Halabja* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xxix.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHEMICAL WARFARE AND IRAQ

Upon receiving the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1919, German professor and chemist Fritz Haber properly concluded that “In no future war will the military be able to ignore poison gas for it is a higher form of killing.” His statement, almost a century old, refers to an undeniable truth still applicable to today. The use of chemical agents as a form of warfare is a modern horror known to millions of individuals, soldiers and civilians alike, who have been unfortunate enough to reside near military conflict within the last one hundred years. Its asphyxiating, burning, and pain-inducing qualities, dependent upon the agent, have left battlefields and cities decimated and littered with any human, animal, or vegetation caught in the deadly clouds. Since its premier use in the First World War, chemical warfare has developed at an incredible rate and has led to more toxic, more persistent, and more efficient weapons whose secrets continue to spread to more and more nations. Due to the terrific effect these agents have on the human mind and body, international organizations have strived to control the research, development, manufacture, stockpiling, and deployment of chemicals as a means of war. Their success in this endeavor has been limited, and there have been multiple occasions in which the use of chemical weapons has been confirmed beyond a doubt, as well as another myriad of occasions in which they were believed to have been used, but the evidence is inconclusive. In her book, *A History of Chemical Warfare*, Kim Coleman identifies five confirmed instances in which chemical warfare has been used within the past ninety years. These five, World War I, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935-36), the Japanese invasion of China (1937-43), the United

States in Vietnam (1965-75), and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), will be further expounded upon in hopes that a better understanding of the history of chemical agents in war can be reached.<sup>2</sup>

An understanding of the basics behind chemical agents and their transition from science to war is a good starting point. Chemical warfare agents can be broken down into four categories: choking, blister, blood, and nerve agents. Choking agents like carbonyl chloride and phosgene attack the respiratory system causing the lungs to fill with fluid and drowning the victim. These agents are odorous and cause irritation of the airways which both act as early warning systems for the victim. Because of these characteristics, choking agents allow the victims to apply gas masks quickly and are not used often. Blister agents like Yperite, commonly known as mustard gas, attack exposed skin and cause large, watery blisters that can be easily infected. These blister agents can be further categorized into arsenicals like Lewisite, which gives enough warning to don a gas mask, and mustards, which act quickly and do not allow time for preventative equipment. Blood agents, like hydrogen cyanide, are inhaled and enter the bloodstream where they cause vital organs to quit functioning. Finally, nerve agents work by preventing an enzyme called acetylcholinesterase from operating normally, which, in turn, causes an accumulation of acetylcholine (ACh), over-excitation, and eventually respiratory paralysis. These do not occur naturally and are further broken down into G-Agents like tabun, sarin, and soman which cause death through inhalation, and the most lethal V-Agents like VX that are more persistent and can be absorbed through the skin.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kim Coleman, *A History of Chemical Warfare* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2005), xv, xx, accessed September 24, 2018, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jmu/detail.action?docID=257360>.

<sup>3</sup> Coleman, 3-4; K. Ganesan, S.K. Raza, and R. Vijayaraghavan, "Chemical Warfare Agents," *Journal of Pharmacy and Bioallied Sciences*, 2 (3), July-September 2010; 166-178, accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3148621/>.

The predecessors to these advanced chemical agents are found in the smoke screens, sleep-inducing fumes, and incendiary devices used in battles fought around 2000 BC. The Spartans further developed this early technology in the Peloponnesian War, the Byzantines at the siege of Constantinople, and Leonardo da Vinci as he developed the first chemical weapon in the form of shells full of arsenic and sulfur meant to be shot at ships. Primitive versions of chemical warfare continued to develop throughout the Middle Ages and by August 1675 the French and the Holy Roman Empire signed the Strasbourg Agreement ending the usage of poison bullets in conflict. This milestone marked the first international agreement that prohibited chemical weapons in modern history.<sup>4</sup>

By the time the First World War began, industrial chemistry had expanded and allowed major world powers to develop toxic chemicals for military use. Britain believed sulfur dioxide clouds could be used on the offensive, the United States created an artillery shell full of hydrogen cyanide, France developed tear gas weapons, and Germany experimented with phosgene and arsenic-filled grenades. As the war progressed, and trench warfare slowed the German offensive, both sides searched for a way to turn the tide. At first, the main use of chemical weapons was not to kill, but simply to harass and drive the enemies out of the trenches and into fields of fire with tear gas and vomiting agents. France actually started the use of tear gas grenades, but it was the Germans who first used chemical weaponry on a large scale. In October 1914, the Germans fired shells at French troops filled with a gas that caused violent sneezing fits during the capture of Neuve Chapelle. These attacks, while precursors to a new phase of the war, were militarily inconsequential. The new phase, led by the Germans and chemist Fritz Haber, included new methods of gas deployment on the battlefield. Haber utilized

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<sup>4</sup> Coleman, 6-7.



commercial gas cylinders filled with chlorine gas, a lethal, non-persistent, and powerful asphyxiate that caused death. These cylinders were opened on April 22, 1915 and a favorable wind carried the cloud of chlorine over the Belgian town of Ypres where British, Canadian, and French troops begged for breath and an escape from the potent gas. The Germans used the gas four more times in May before the Allies found a way to build crude versions of respirators to reduce the chlorine's effectiveness.<sup>5</sup>

The British counterattack at Loos in September 1915 showed the Allies deficiency in chemical knowledge. The attack failed as the wind blew the gas back towards their own lines causing friendly casualties and showing the British misunderstanding of how best to use the weapon. Additionally, the chemical agents were not enough to overcome the German advantage in the trenches. The inability of artillery to provide supportive fire and the lack of reserve infantry divisions to exploit the breakthrough in enemy lines further limited the British. The Germans continued to stay ahead in terms of production and development, and were the first to use mustard gas in artillery shells when they attacked the Russians at Riga in September 1916 and then against the British in July 1917 at Ypres. The troublesome characteristic about mustard gas was that it remained potent in the soil for weeks after its employment and froze in the soil in the winter where it would later thaw and have the same effects. This means any use of the gas over trenches rendered those trenches unattainable until the gas dissipated, as well as proves that commanders had the knowledge and ability to determine which chemical agents to use at certain times and locations depending on their mission and avenue of approach.<sup>6</sup>

As the lethality of chemicals improved so did the methods in which they were delivered. Haber's gas cylinders depended entirely on the wind to blow the agent across the battlefield and

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<sup>5</sup> Coleman, xv-xvi, 12-18; Ganesan, Raza, Vijayaraghavan 166-167.

<sup>6</sup> Coleman, 23-25.

into enemy lines. Britain's failure at Loos proved the shortcomings of this method. To solve this Britain employed four-inch Stokes mortars that fired gas cylinders to more accurately drop agents on the Germans. This was the first direct violation of the 1899 Hague Convention which "prohibited the use of projectiles, the object of which was diffusion of asphyxiating gases," and opened the gates for the expansion of chemical warfare. The French, too, utilized gas shells filled with the blood agent, hydrogen cyanide during the battle of Somme in 1916. Over the course of the First World War the use of chemicals developed from gas cloud attacks delivered by favorable winds, to gas shell attacks, to explosive shells that caused more damage by keeping the agent airborne longer. These last two methods were used near the end of the war and on one specific occasion had an impact that would affect the future of chemical warfare. In Wervick, Belgium a corporal named Adolf Hitler was burned and temporarily blinded during a British mustard gas attack. His experience in this war would lead to his distaste for chemical weaponry and his decisions not to employ such weapons in the Second World War. Yet, while some, like Hitler, were turned away from the use of chemical warfare, others began to respect its power and potential on the battlefield. Still, the 100,000 deaths and 1.2 million casualties caused by chemical warfare in World War I led General John J. Pershing to state in his final report to Congress, "Whether or not gas will be employed in future wars is a matter of conjecture, but the effect is so deadly to the unprepared that we can never afford to neglect the question."<sup>7</sup>

In an attempt to regulate the use of such weapons after the war, the Allies forbade German production and use of gas weaponry under Article 171 of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. Although this limited Germany's ability to do research, Fritz Haber continued his work under the guise of studying pest control. He, and other chemists, hoped to improve current agents so they

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<sup>7</sup> Coleman, xv, xxii, 26-28, 31; Ganesan, Raza, Vijayaraghavan, 167-168.

were cheaper and safer to produce and develop newer, more effective agents as well. While these developments in future chemical warfare continued during the interwar period, so did the use of contemporary weapons and agents around the world. When the Ottoman Empire broke down after the First World War, the League of Nations split the provinces amongst the British and French. The British received the portion known as modern-day Iraq and placed an Arabian ruler named Faisal on the throne. Under his rule, in June 1920, a large rebellion broke out against colonial rule, and the British, with full support from Winston Churchill, responded by using incendiary weapons and poison gas to successfully crush the revolt. Similarly, in Morocco in 1921, Spain and France used poison gas to quell a Berber rebellion. The Berbers in the Rif region had pushed the Spanish back north and in response the Spanish, with French aid, utilized poison gas to regain control of the region.<sup>8</sup>

International conflicts such as these led to the 1925 Geneva Convention for the Supervision of the International Traffic in Arms and Ammunition. This convention, whose objectives were both vague and easy to evade, was the first attempt to prohibit the use of chemical and biological weapons in war. On June 17, 1925 thirty-eight signatories agreed to prohibit the use of chemical weaponry during inter-state conflicts. The document, however, failed to explain if the use of chemical weapons in internal or civil conflicts was prohibited, as well as failing to prohibit basic research, production, or possession of chemical weapons. Compliance with these laws was completely voluntary, and in fact, the United States refused to ratify it. The Geneva Protocol was enforced beginning February 08, 1928, but as time went on the word “enforced” was proven to be quite the wrong term.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Coleman, 40, 42-45.

<sup>9</sup> Coleman, 45-46.

Ten years after signing the Geneva Protocol, Italy, in 1935, invaded Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) from their colony in Eritrea. Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations who in turn placed limited economic sanctions on Mussolini's Italy. As a result, Italy needed to move their campaign forward and take control of Ethiopia prior to the sting of the sanctions on the economy. They chose to do so by dropping mustard gas bombs and spraying mustard gas from aircraft while also utilizing phosgene and chloropicrin in attacks whose legitimacy are still questioned today. The use of these attacks varied from protecting the flanks of advancing units, to disrupting Ethiopian communications, to demoralizing Ethiopian troops thereby showing the versatility in chemical weapons usage. Italy justified their attacks and claimed that they had not broken the Geneva Protocol they signed a decade earlier because Ethiopia had tortured and killed Italian prisoners of war.<sup>10</sup>

The interwar period concluded with a major discovery that changed the nature of chemical warfare. In 1936, Dr. Gerhard Schrader, a German scientist working at the chemical company IG Farben, was studying insecticides when he stumbled upon an array of poisons that when mixed became the first nerve gas agent. Schrader named this colorless, odorless gas that entered the body through inhalation or skin penetration, tabun. The Germans kept this agent secret and continued Schrader's research. A year later he discovered sarin gas, another nerve agent that was ten times as poisonous as tabun. While phosgene and mustard gas were still the bulk of chemical weapons stockpiles, the discoveries of the world's most deadly chemical agents foreshadowed a more gruesome style of warfare.<sup>11</sup>

The Japanese use of gas in their invasion of China in 1937 led the world to believe the battlefields of World War II would be littered with gas shells dropped during air raids. Their use

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<sup>10</sup> Coleman, 45-49.

<sup>11</sup> Coleman, 51-52.

of tear-gas grenades, arsenic smoke screens, and later on mustard gas and Lewisite influenced countries like Great Britain and caused them to issue gas masks to the entire civilian population, an estimated thirty million, which included babies. To their surprise, however, gas was not used in the Second World War. Unlike the First World War, the Second was a war of rapid mobility epitomized by the German Blitzkrieg. This tempo rendered the gas attacks ineffective as it would impact both the offense and defense as they maneuvered around the battlefield. Additionally, gas was no longer a new technology. Both sides of the war had chemical capabilities leading to a miniature feeling of mutually assured destruction. Hitler, whose past experiences already made him unwilling to use gas, recognized the retaliation that would have met Germany and the unprepared population had he used gas.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, both sides built factories to produce poison gas. While Britain chose never to use these facilities for their intended purpose, Germany utilized their own at Dyhernfurth and Gendorf for nerve gas development. Germany employed twice the scientists Britain did, and in May 1943 a captured German scientist revealed everything he knew about what he called Trilon 83, better known today as tabun. British knowledge of this nerve agent came two years prior to the end of the war, but they never took advantage of the information or developed their own tabun weapons. This large employment of scientists led to the development of Zyklon B, a hydrochloric acid created by the German Pest Control Corporation, Degesh. Zyklon B, used to kill vermin and fight disease in labor camps, was then tested by Karl Fritizsch and Rudolf Höss in gas chambers at Auschwitz. The gas entered the membranes of the mouth, nose, esophagus, stomach, and lungs, and entered the bloodstream leading to a quick death. As scholar Coleman stated: “Additionally, with each inhalation the person retained more of the gas and so the

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<sup>12</sup> Coleman, 50, 59-60.

concentration of poison in the air was reduced. This fact simplified the ventilation problems afterwards.” While Hitler did not use gas against the Allies, for fear of retaliation, he used it against the groups he knew did not have the capabilities to fight back.<sup>13</sup>

Regardless of their knowledge of German research and tabun, the Allies were confident the Germans would not use chemical agents against them, and therefore left all anti-gas equipment in Britain when they invaded Normandy on June 6, 1944. General Omar Bradley remarked, “When D-Day ended, without a whiff of gas, I was relieved. For even a light sprinkling of persistent gas on Omaha Beach would have forced a decision in one of history’s climatic battles.” Again, the use of chemical agents on the battlefield was desirable for many. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall both approved plans to utilize gas during the war, but were voted down at the last moment. Churchill believed that he could shorten the war by targeting 1,600 German cities or strategic locations to attack with phosgene and mustard gas. British military planning staffs advised against that plan as the Allies would have to fight in those cities and towns as well as deal with the likely retaliation from the Germans.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, in the United States, although President Franklin Delano Roosevelt never planned to use poison gas except in retaliation, his military developed contingency plans for their possible use. A thirty-page document code-named Operation Downfall, written by the Army Chemical Warfare Service in June 1945, called for the United States to attack over fifty urban targets in Japan. This would take place as a two-stage operation beginning with an assault on the southernmost Japanese island, Kyushu, in November from which bombers could drop phosgene on the mainland. This phase was called Operation Olympic and “might easily kill five million

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<sup>13</sup> Coleman, 61-65.

<sup>14</sup> Coleman, 66, 72.

people and injure many more.” Operation Coronet would follow in March 1946 with an assault on Tokyo to force the Japanese surrender. General Marshall approved this plan; however, his senior staff argued chemical warfare would complicate the mission in the East and would not be decisive enough. Before a final decision could be reached, President Harry Truman authorized the dropping of the atomic bomb, thereby ending any further discussion.<sup>15</sup>

After the war, the chemical warfare program (now named chemical *defense*) returned to a pre-war size and mentality. This decision was made due to the lack of public support for chemical warfare, the lack of a need to resort to gas when other means were more effective, and the threat of retaliation even after the war. Further, the post-war Potsdam Agreement stated that “All arms, ammunition and implements of war [belonging to the Germans] shall be held at the disposal of the Allies or destroyed.” The majority of chemical stockpiles from both sides were dumped into the Baltic Sea, Bay of Biscay, and off the coasts of Scotland, Ireland, and Japan. Demilitarization efforts included the control of German research and notes regarding the development of chemical agents. These efforts failed in some parts of Germany as the Soviet Union was able to capture the tabun-producing factory in Dyhernfurth and the almost completed sarin-producing factory at Falkenhagen. In the Soviets exploration of these facilities they learned about soman, the German’s most secret and poisonous nerve agent. Soman is a colorless liquid with a slightly fruity odor that causes a runny nose, salivation, nausea, involuntary urination and defecation, convulsions, and respiratory failure. It is twice as toxic as tabun. While the British and United States were still trying to understand the agents’ effects on the nervous system, the Soviets had factories and plants that would be fully serviceable within

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<sup>15</sup> Coleman, 72-75.

months. This knowledge sparked an arms development race and kicked off the forty-four year Cold War.<sup>16</sup>

The United States quickly built a huge arsenal of chemical weapons including a new nerve agent discovered by Dr. Ranajit Ghosh in 1952. Ghosh had been working with pesticides in Britain at the time, but with the post-war government's inability to fund more research, Ghosh turned to the United States with his knowledge in 1953. This agent was far more toxic and persistent than tabun or sarin, caused the same effects of all nerve agents, and ended in a loss of consciousness, coma, and death. It was venomous in nature and therefore the United States called their weaponized version of the agent VX, a drop of which could kill the enemy. A cocktail of drugs called Atropine served as an antidote, but was limited and often did not reach victims quickly enough.<sup>17</sup>

After World War II, the United States began to take over the use of chemical weaponry in their efforts to police third-world countries like Vietnam. The effective method of gas bombing in urban environments did not translate well to the jungles. Therefore, in 1961, President Kennedy initiated Project Ranch Hand and authorized the Department of Defense to begin trials on anti-plant agents in South Vietnam. The ability to drop chemicals from aircraft and have them clear the ground of vegetation as well as the enemy proved a very attractive military course of action. These anti-plant agents, given color code names based on the painted stripe around each fifty-five gallon drum it came in (i.e. the infamous Agent Orange), were used extensively from 1961-67, but began to decline as the United States' stockpiles were running low, as public concern for the Vietnamese farmers increased, as the scientific community began to worry about lasting effects on the nation's ecology, and as the international community cracked down on the

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<sup>16</sup> Coleman, 79-82.

<sup>17</sup> Coleman, 85-86.



laws of war. Outside nations did not see the line the United States drew between defoliants like Agent Orange and chemical weapons designed specifically to kill people. In an April 1969 attempt to better clarify the United States' chemical warfare policy the Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird explained:

It is the policy of the United States to develop and maintain a defensive chemical and biological capability so that United States military forces can operate for some period of time in a toxic environment if necessary; to develop and maintain a limited offensive capability in order to deter all use of chemical... weapons by the threat of retaliation in kind; and to continue a program of research and development in this area to minimize the possibility of technological surprise.<sup>18</sup>

Secretary Laird's words eloquently and effectively explain the defensive policy of the United States in reference to chemical warfare.

The United States' use of anti-plant agents, napalm, and white phosphorous, considered legitimate munitions by the United States killed many during the Vietnam War, but the death of one Australian Corporal named Robert Bowtell opened the floodgates for chemical weaponry opposition. *The New York Times* printed Bowtell's story and explained how he had been fighting Vietcong Guerrillas in the tunnels northwest of Saigon when he was exposed to some type of asphyxiating gas. Although he was wearing a gas mask, Bowtell was killed and the story's exposure led to a call for action. The United Nations responded with a 1969 Resolution to the Geneva Protocol which demanded strict compliance from all states with the principles of the original protocol. This feeble attempt to regulate chemical weapons failed once again, and

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<sup>18</sup> Coleman, 90-95, 104.

even though the United States came very close to ratifying the protocol, they chose not to in the end.<sup>19</sup>

The United Nations continued its efforts and openly condemned the production and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction throughout the Cold War. The United States came under intense pressure when Congress revealed it had been secretly testing nerve agents at Edgewood Arsenal and Fort McClellan. President Nixon stepped in to dissolve the potential conflict and reaffirmed his non-first-use policy as well as resubmitted the 1925 Geneva Protocol to the Senate for ratification. The Senate finally ratified the Protocol in 1974 and President Gerald Ford signed it in January of the following year, thereby ending chemical agent production, at least until 1979. By that year the Soviet Union was found to have chemical arms and defense capabilities equivalent to that of the United States, prompting the United States to reboot their chemical program and stay ahead of their Cold War foe. The use of Soviet-developed chemical weapons in Laos in 1975, Vietnam in 1978, and Afghanistan in 1979 were all ignored because while the Soviet Union had signed the Geneva Protocol in 1928, the other three states had not, and retaliation against non-signatories was not prohibited. These and further actions in Egypt, Yemen, and Syria fueled a chemical weapons exploration in the Middle East that culminated in the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

The Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s is a horrifying, modern example of the use of chemical weaponry in war. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's long-term goal of Arab unity and regional dominance led to an Arabization campaign that targeted minorities within Iraq's borders. The campaign against the Kurds in northern Iraq was called the al-Anfal campaign and involved the massacre of 150,000 to 200,000 individuals. The most devastating attack of this campaign

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<sup>19</sup> Coleman, 98-100.

<sup>20</sup> Coleman, 104-108.

occurred on March 16, 1988 as Saddam bombed five thousand citizens in the Kurdish village of Halabja through the use of mustard gas and nerve agents. These events raised a few questions. What caused this type of retaliation from Saddam? Why would Saddam bomb his own land and murder his own citizens? What role did Iran play in this part of the war?<sup>21</sup>

The war was eight-years old at the time of the Halabja massacre, but the history between Iraq, Iran, and the Kurds goes back much further. The Iran-Iraq war began as the two nations competed for regional dominance and a role as the Arab world power. The Iraq Saddam Hussein was born into was fractured and created from a British colonial failure. The Allied victory over the Ottoman Empire in World War I left the region open for British colonialism, however, excessive debt from the war and a series of revolts against the Westerners forced Britain to change its plans. The result was an unfinished Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq with three very different regions divided by language, ethnic origins, and religion. The Southern province contained Shi'a tribes, the Kurds resided in the oil-rich Northern province, and the Sunnis lived in the central portion of Iraq and gained relative control by default due to their geographic position. This design forced the three groups to come together and collectively call themselves Iraqis. Iraq's first monarch, Faisal, was installed by the British and remarked in 1933, "There is still – and I say this with a heart full of sorrow – no Iraqi people, but unimaginable masses of human beings, devoid of any patriotic idea, imbued with religious traditions and absurdities, connected by no common tie, giving ear to evil, prone to anarchy, and perpetually ready to rise against any government whatever."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Williamson Murray and Kevin M. Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 332-334.

<sup>22</sup> Murray and Woods, 11-12.

Coups and counter-coups characterized the next twenty-five years as Iraqi autonomy was repressed under limited British imperialism. In 1958 the monarchy was overthrown and an Iraqi Republic remained for the next decade. Turmoil continued during the Republic and resulted in a competition for power in Bagdad as three contenders fought for control of Iraq. These contenders included the Iraqi military, the Communist party, and the emerging Ba'ath Party.<sup>23</sup> The Ba'ath Party had launched an unsuccessful coup in 1963, but later succeeded in placing General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr in power five years later. The Ba'ath Party believed in "one Arab nation with an immortal mission" and had the goal of putting Iraq back in its rightful place as a dominant nation in the world. Saddam Hussein grew up as a young leader in this party and was indoctrinated in its beliefs. Those beliefs often aligned with those taught to him by his uncle Khayrallah Talfah who had written the work *Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews, and Flies* and helped develop Saddam's worldview and hunger for Arab dominance.<sup>24</sup>

By 1975, Saddam had risen through the ranks and was "vice president of Iraq's revolutionary command council (RCC) – in effect, the country's number-two man behind his relative and president, Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr. Saddam was arguably more powerful than the president due to his control of the intelligence services." In this role, Saddam negotiated with Iran over the Shatt al-Arab waterway, fought against the Kurds' campaign for autonomy, and unhappily watched the signing of the Algiers Agreement.<sup>25</sup> Iraqi pride and power were

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<sup>23</sup> Ba'ath means resurrection in Arabic.

<sup>24</sup> Murray and Woods, 13-18.

<sup>25</sup> The Shatt al-Arab waterway separated Iraq and Iran and was essential to the transportation of petroleum northwards for both states. The British forced this border on the two nations in 1937, but in 1969 the Shah of Iran abrogated the treaty and gave Iran de facto control over the waterway. Meanwhile the Kurds re-launched their campaign for sovereignty after the Ba'ath Revolution and successfully used hit-and-run tactics against the Iraqi military. The Kurds, backed by the Shah, Americans, and Israelis continued to fight and distracted Baghdad into 1974. In order to end this problem, the Iraqis negotiated with the Shah. The resulting Algiers Agreement was

decimated following these events and by July 1979 President al-Bakr resigned. Saddam immediately took over as Iraq's president, secretary general of the Ba'ath Party's regional command, chairman of the RCC, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. His execution of twenty-two of the Ba'ath Party's most senior members cemented his authority and ensured the loyalty of his government. As professor Williamson Murray and historian Kevin Woods state, "In terms of its power, Saddam believed his new state, resting on Arab nationalism and oil, would easily equal China and perhaps even the United States." Saddam believed his Iraq was on the rise and searched for a way to show it. His hatred for the Jewish state of Israel was met with a respect for their capabilities, so he turned to a closer and more attractive enemy.<sup>26</sup>

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passed in March 1975 and forced Iraq to acknowledge Iranian authority over half of the Shatt al-Arab in return for an end to Iranian support for the Kurds.

<sup>26</sup> Murray and Woods, 20-23, 25, 28.

## THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR AND RELATIONS: 1980-1987

Iran and Iraq had a series of historical problems that included competition for regional dominance, chronic territorial disputes, support for different populations, and the fact that Iran embraced Shi'a Islam in the sixteenth century, a decision strongly opposed by Iraq's Sunni elite. If Saddam could invade Iran and earn a quick victory, he believed he would be immortalized as a great Arab leader and regain the Shatt territory as well as some of the pride and Arabization momentum lost over the past five years. The overthrow of the Shah by Ayatollah Khomeini and the subsequent Iranian Revolution only added to his confidence. Iran lost support from the United States and therefore the military equipment previously supplied by them. A lack of replacements for broken parts coupled with the weakened military caused by Khomeini as he executed pro-Shah leaders and began a loyalist military, designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, made Iran appear vulnerable. Saddam's knowledge of this potential vulnerability; Iraq's stockpile of Soviet weaponry acquired through the 1972 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation;<sup>27</sup> and the Iraqi alliance with the Gulf States of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan encouraged Saddam's outlook on his military ambitions. In March 1980, Iran withdrew diplomats from Baghdad, and in April 1980 border clashes intensified. Over forty-five years of history between the two states met along the Shatt al-Arab and set the stage for the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The 1972 Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was a fifteen-year pact between the nations in which each pledged to cooperate on issues of defense and western involvement in the Middle East. Iraq recognized the growing Communist Party within its borders, and in return, received Soviet weapons for their defense. "Soviet and Iraq in a 15-Year Pact," *New York Times*, April 10, 1972, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/04/10/archives/soviet-and-iraq-in-15year-pact-more-military-assistance-expected.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Hiltermann, 23-24; Murray and Woods, 31-46.

On September 14, 1980 Iran announced that it would no longer follow the Algiers Agreement and Iraq responded three days later also denouncing the Agreement on the terms that Iran consistently violated the accords anyway. The breaking of this agreement, coupled with the increased air activity along the border and a May 1980 report claiming that Iran entered Iraq thirty-seven times in forty-five days to resupply the Kurds in the north and reconnoiter the south led Saddam to the battlefield. His declaration that, ““This *shatt* shall again be, as it has been throughout history, Iraqi and Arab in name and reality,” led directly into Iraq’s entrance into Iran on September 22, 1980. Notes from an Iraqi government meeting held six days earlier show that “neither he [Saddam] nor his advisors had a clear idea of what military operations would entail,” but Saddam initiated the war regardless. At the time Iran’s geopolitical position was superior to Iraq in every way. Iraq had a population three times smaller than Iran’s (thirteen million compared to thirty-nine million); Iraq’s oil was located close to its border with Iran; Iraq was landlocked and Iran controlled its only passage to the sea, the Shatt al-Arab; and Iraq’s ethnic and religious divisions were deeper than Iran’s. Although Saddam knew these facts he refused to believe that his vision of an Arab world with Iraq at its center would ever be denied. This mentality drove him to continue the war even when his plan for a quick victory failed and Iran’s superior resources began to show.<sup>29</sup>

The war started off with an Iraqi offensive that kept the Iranians in a defensive posture until the Iraqi military was stretched too thin to continue advancing. Iran’s counter-offensives, characterized by human-wave assaults, began in 1982 and turned the war into one of attrition. Would Iran run out of men willing to die or would Iraq run out of bullets first? Iran’s population superiority forced Iraq to gather every military-aged man, placed extreme pressure on these new

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<sup>29</sup> Murray and Woods, 48-50, 72, 90.

ground forces, and depleted the Iraqi treasury as Saddam tried to neutralize the human waves through artillery strikes. His response to Iran's manpower advantage was threefold: he planned to use inexpensive chemical weapons to increase Iranian casualties and combat their population advantage, wage war on Iran's civilian population and cities to reduce morale and support for the war, and cut off Iranian oil exports. The decision to use chemical weapons opened a door that was not shut for the remainder of the war.<sup>30</sup>

The global stage in which the Iran-Iraq War took place is difficult to characterize. International relations swayed from clear understandings to blurred chaos, spending considerable more time in the latter, as alliances and economics influenced the political decisions of nations and their relationship with the belligerents. Events that occurred at the onset of the war became the precedent and existed as trends for the next eight years. The administration of a non-binding United Nations Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire, followed by Iraq's willingness to negotiate an end to the war, answered by Iran's immediate and unwavering rejection stands out as the most consistent trend. This chapter strives to expand upon that trend to show why the lack of an effective and aggressive international response to the war, specifically the use of chemical weapons, led to the conflict's continuation and descent into a total war that eventually brought nerve gas to the lungs of civilians in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Paramount to an understanding of international relations during the war is a knowledge of the region's historical alliances and ties with global powers prior to the 1980s. During the Vietnam War the United States and Great Britain relied on the Shah of Iran to balance the Middle East and keep the Soviet influence at bay. In doing so, the United States provided Iran with eight Tomcat interceptors armed with Phoenix missiles with the capability of destroying a

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<sup>30</sup> Hiltermann, 25-26; Murray and Woods, 203-204, 240.



target more than ninety miles away. Iranian military students trained in the United States and the two nations maintained a civil nuclear cooperation program. Meanwhile, Saddam Hussein and Iraqi president al-Bakr reconciled the nation's relationship with the Soviet Union through the 1972 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation as they recognized the Iraqi Communist Party in return for Soviet weaponry. Iraq also turned to the French who provided them with weapons (armored vehicles, mortars and shells, missiles, helicopters, anti-aircraft radar systems, etc.), civil nuclear power assistance in the form of the Franco-Iraqi Cooperation Agreement of November 1985, Scud missiles (as did the USSR), and cooperation in the oil sector. With French help, Saddam was able to build two offshore oil terminals at Mina al-Bakr and Khor al-Amaya allowing them to rival Iran in the oil industry. Baghdad's argument that Iraq was the Arab's natural shield from Iranian imperialism further increased the nation's standing as it gained the valuable support of the Gulf States.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth noting the United States at this time supported Iran, a position very different than the one in which the nation would find itself ten years later. Iraq had broken diplomatic ties with the United States after June 1967 when the United States backed Israel in the Six Day War and a second time when the American ally was attacked by Iraq and other Arab states in 1973. The state of Israel wedged Iraq and the United States apart while Cold War logic aligned Iran with the United States leading historians to believe that the United States did not want Iraq to attack Iran. Baghdad and Moscow had just signed the 1972 treaty meaning the Iraqi army would have used Soviet weaponry, a decision the United States would not want to see because it would offer the Soviets a global stage to demonstrate the power of their weaponry without the United

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<sup>31</sup> Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, trans. Nicholas Elliott (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), 53-55, 58, 89-91.

States being able or willing to counter in a competition for superiority. The United States could not back Iraq if this fight took place because of their alliance with Israel, and the weapons contracts and flow of oil connecting Iran to the United States offered a much more attractive side with which to ally.<sup>32</sup>

Then in 1979, the Islamic Revolution, ousting of the Shah, and institution of Ayatollah Khomeini led to an anti-Western Iran that cancelled the arms contracts and cost the United States ten billion dollars in revenue. The resulting trade embargo preventing the sale of spare parts to the Iranian army, the decision to provide American medical treatment to the exiled Shah, and the secret meeting between Iranian Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and United States National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski in October of 1979 soured relations between the two countries. The November 4 hostage crisis at the American embassy in Tehran illustrated the complete breakdown between the two nations. Still, the United States and President Jimmy Carter did not favor war against Iran. War would have caused a slower liberation of the hostages, a steep increase in oil prices, and the Soviet intervention in Iran in order to help Iraq. Pierre Razoux, historian and author of *The Iran-Iraq War*, writes, “In the American elite’s eyes, the natural partner of the United States clearly had to remain Iran; Iraq could only serve as a foil.”<sup>33</sup>

Yet, President Carter chose neither war nor appeasement, but rather indifference, as he decided not to warn Iran of Iraqi preparations for war. When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981 the Iranians released the fifty-two hostages, reopened relations with Washington D.C. and received eight billion dollars in now unfrozen assets and an arms deal worth \$480 million. This deal for spare tank and aircraft parts slid around the trade embargo because South Korea, Greece,

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<sup>32</sup> Razoux, 69-73.

<sup>33</sup> Razoux, 69-73, 78-79.

Turkey, and Taiwan delivered their own equipment to Iran and were later reimbursed financially by the United States. To be certain, despite these deals the United States were not allies with the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. The Reagan government simply utilized economic and military resources to secure the safe return of American citizens.<sup>34</sup>

A very similar series of events occurred on the other side of the war between Iraq and the USSR. The Soviet Union was not pleased their ally chose to attack Iran without first consulting them. The Kremlin believed Saddam was too arrogant and had started a war that would draw the United States back into the region. Still, the USSR chose to preserve diplomatic relations with their Middle Eastern ally and keep military advisors in Baghdad. In display of their displeasure the USSR cut all weapons deliveries to Iraq and stop all contracts currently under negotiation. The Kremlin even reached out to Iran to offer Soviet support, an offer that Ayatollah Khomeini declined at the time, but would later accept discreetly. The two nations traded, sending spare parts and weapons to Iran in return for a US-made Tomcat for the Soviets to study. Meanwhile, the Soviets continued to secretly supply Iraq through other Socialist countries like Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Even China backed Baghdad and provided arms for the Iraqi army in order to compete with the USSR, conquer new markets, and maintain balance.<sup>35</sup>

A myriad of European nations entered into the war on one side or the other, sometimes both, often looking for the best contracts. France supported Iraq as mentioned above, but also provided Iran with rail, automobile, audiovisual, and nuclear equipment until Ayatollah Khomeini took power and denounced the nuclear agreement with Paris. The British continued to support contracts signed before the war. Germany remained “neutral” but sold weaponry to their biggest regional trading partner, Iran, behind closed doors, while also selling Mercedes cars,

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<sup>34</sup> Razoux, 80-82.

<sup>35</sup> Razoux, 82-87.

machine tools, chemicals for weapons of mass destruction, tank recovery vehicles and more to Iraq. Italy too tried to play both sides as they honored old contracts, while Spain and Greece shipped spare parts for US designed F-4 Phantom jets to Iran, and weapons, antitank guns, and Land Rovers to Iraq. Historian Razoux explained, “Overall, European countries delivered twenty-seven billion dollars’ worth of military equipment to Iraq and Iran, making up a quarter of their weapon purchases.” Latin American and Asian countries also joined in on the economic opportunities the war offered, albeit to a lesser degree.<sup>36</sup>

In terms of regional alliances, it is sufficient to show which side the nations chose to support and categorize them accordingly. Razoux observed,

Arab leaders took positions based on their own interests, the nature of their bilateral relations with Baghdad and Tehran, but especially their rivalries – for several of them harbored ambitions to impose their leadership on the Arab-speaking world. Yet all agreed on one thing: everything had to be done to avoid letting the conflict develop into a regionwide war that could potentially degenerate into a military conflict between the Americans and the Soviets, with the Arabs left to bear the devastating consequences.<sup>37</sup>

Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Egypt all supported Iraq for reasons ranging from the guarantees of cheap oil and safety (Jordan), to support for Baghdad because their rival supported Tehran (Morocco and Algeria respectfully), to hatred for Iran (Egypt) and the use of Iraq as a natural barrier to Iranian Shiite influence (Saudi Arabia). Contrarily, Algeria, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, South Yemen, and Israel supported Iran in one way or another. Their reasons too ranged from direct hatred of the enemy (Libya, Syria,

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<sup>36</sup> Razoux, 93-99.

<sup>37</sup> Razoux, 100-101.

Israel) to distaste for the enemy's allies (South Yemen, Algeria). Only Oman and Bahrain managed to remain neutral mediators as they both requested the presence of Western military forces in the region.<sup>38</sup>

With these alliances in place Iraq and Iran began a pre-war dance of bombings and border disputes in late August 1980. Iran's choice to deny foreign journalists access to conflict zones caused the international community to distrust Iran, while Saddam encouraged journalists to see the villages of Khanaqin and Mandali after Iran bombed them on September 4, 1980. Saddam denounced the Algiers Agreement two weeks later and Ayatollah Khomeini responded with a refusal to negotiate and a call to war. The United Nations Security Council, still locked in their fragile alliances and hardened Cold War mentalities, could not reach an agreement and simply watched the war begin. Days after the start of the war, Saddam recognized his progress was not promising. He decided a ceasefire and negotiation rather than an offensive may be the best course of action saying, "Iraq is prepared to negotiate directly with the Iranian party, or through a third party or any international organization, for a just and honorable solution that guarantees our rights." Iraq's terms were the renouncement of the Algiers Agreement by the Supreme Leader, recognition of Iraqi sovereignty over the entire Shatt al-Arab, and the Iraqi control of the lands around Qasr-e-Shirin, Sumer, and Mehran that the Iraqi army had already conquered. Saddam issued a unilateral truce in the first week of October in an attempt to convince Tehran to accept his offer. Iran simply responded with the demands they never gave up on for the next eight years: the stepping down of Saddam Hussein, the admission that Iraq was the aggressor, compensation for war damages with control of Basra until the debt was paid, and a referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan to allow the Kurds to choose between autonomy and integration into Iran.

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<sup>38</sup> Razoux, 100-113.

Again, in October 1980 Saddam offered to hold negotiations with Tehran. His initial offensive had stalled at Khorramshahr and the beginning of winter ended his campaign. Iran, again responded with their list of conditions, unacceptable in Saddam's eyes. The end of 1980 convinced Saddam that he needed to "coerce Iran into negotiating by bombing its population and oil infrastructure."<sup>39</sup>

Iraq's transition of the offensive to Iraqi Kurdistan characterized the first half of 1981, quickly followed by a summer full of important changes. The Israelis destroyed the Osirak nuclear power plant in early June 1981 with direct hits to the plant's main reactor, contamination dome, and underground research lab. The damage cost Saddam billions of dollars and the ability to force Iran to surrender under nuclear threat. Saddam also could no longer retaliate against Israel without opening a second front. His place as the Arab world's leader, a position he believed had to be held by a nation with nuclear capabilities, was also called into question. Iraq's loss of nuclear power was also a critical turning point for the international community. France and the Soviet Union no longer backed Iraq's nuclear program, but the United States, USSR, and European nations entered into closer relations with Iraq now that their nuclear supremacy was not challenged.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini removed President Bani-Sadr on June 11, 1981 and two months later two mullahs named Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei stepped on to the political scene as speaker of Parliament and President respectfully. Together with Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi they established a new military doctrine revolving around three core principles: a requirement to follow all orders given by the Supreme Leader to the letter, the desire to cut all dependency on foreign nations for equipment and thus become self-

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<sup>39</sup> Razoux, 11-13, 43-44, 135, 146-148.

<sup>40</sup> Razoux, 165-169.

sufficient, and the need to simplify military operations and lower the cost of war through the use of cheap, excess weaponry. The only excess weaponry Iran possessed were troops, and on March 17, 1982 Operation Fatimah proved that human wave assaults could be effective against Iraqi defenses, a strategy the Iranians would continue to use throughout the war. These human wave attacks were often made up of soldiers of all ages. In the spring of 1982 the Pasdaran<sup>41</sup> boasted a 150,000-man militia however, only a third of these soldiers were actually of draft age. The Ministry of Education prioritized preparing children for war instead of teaching the curriculum. These child soldiers were not even given weapons. They were handed grenades and were not issued identification tags because they often did not survive long enough to make it worth the cost. Two years later at the Majnoon Islands, 57 percent of the Iranian force were children, and by the war's end in 1988 close to 80,000 children had been killed.<sup>42</sup>

In late April 1982, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)<sup>43</sup> called for a resolution between the two belligerents. The proposal was based on an Iraqi withdrawal from the territory occupied since September 1980, the establishment of a buffer force provided by OIC member states, the development of an international committee sent to make a ruling regarding the Shatt al-Arab, and the creation of a commission designed to assess the damages done to Iran thus far. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)<sup>44</sup> even offered to prepare a compensation fund for Iran, yet Ayatollah Khomeini remained immovable. He rejected the mediation and

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<sup>41</sup> Pasdaran was the informal name given to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps loyal to the Ayatollah Khomeini.

<sup>42</sup> Razoux, 170-176, 195-196, 345-46.

<sup>43</sup> The Organization of Islamic Cooperation was founded in 1972 with the goals of promoting economic, educational, political, and social unity and partnerships between member states all of whom are dedicated to the Muslim faith.

<sup>44</sup> The Gulf Cooperation Council was not a military alliance, but rather the integration of six Arab nations (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman) for the purpose of uniting economic policies against Iran. Created on May 25, 1981, the Council's objective was to promote a regional market with a shared currency.

demanding Saddam Hussein step down, Iraq recognize their responsibility for starting the war, and the repatriation of Shiites expelled in 1980. Saddam, in turn, denied the demands.<sup>45</sup>

Other international peace initiatives also failed miserably. Five days after the hostilities began, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 479 asking the belligerents to not turn to force, and inviting the international community to prevent the conflict's expansion. Saddam proclaimed his willingness to put an end to the war if Iran gave up the Shatt al-Arab and respected internationally-recognized borders, but Iran proved unwilling. Other nonaligned states like India, Cuba, and Pakistan tried mediation as well; all returned empty-handed. But now that Iran had taken the initiative the United States was prepared to further support Middle Eastern nations fighting Iranian and Islamic expansionism. Washington desired to remain neutral, but realized Iraq may be the weaker regime and might need assistance in order to stop the Iranian attacks and westward movement. President Ronald Reagan authorized the CIA to secretly provide military equipment to Iraq as long as it was not American-made. This directive took the form of large amounts of Soviet-made weapons and ammunition sent to Iraq via the gray market. Further, President Reagan sent CIA veteran Tom Twetten to Baghdad to provide them with satellite imagery of the front lines near the border, and convinced Congress to take Iraq off the list of states supporting terrorism, a decision that historian Razoux explained, "made it possible to reestablish bilateral commercial ties, bank loans, and American investments in Iraq. It also paved the way for a potential resumption of diplomatic relations."<sup>46</sup>

In June 1982, Saddam was gifted with another opportunity to end the war honorably. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) hiding in Lebanon was believed to be responsible for an attack on the Israeli ambassador in London. Israel retaliated by crossing the border into

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<sup>45</sup> Razoux, 111, 202.

<sup>46</sup> Razoux, 203-207.



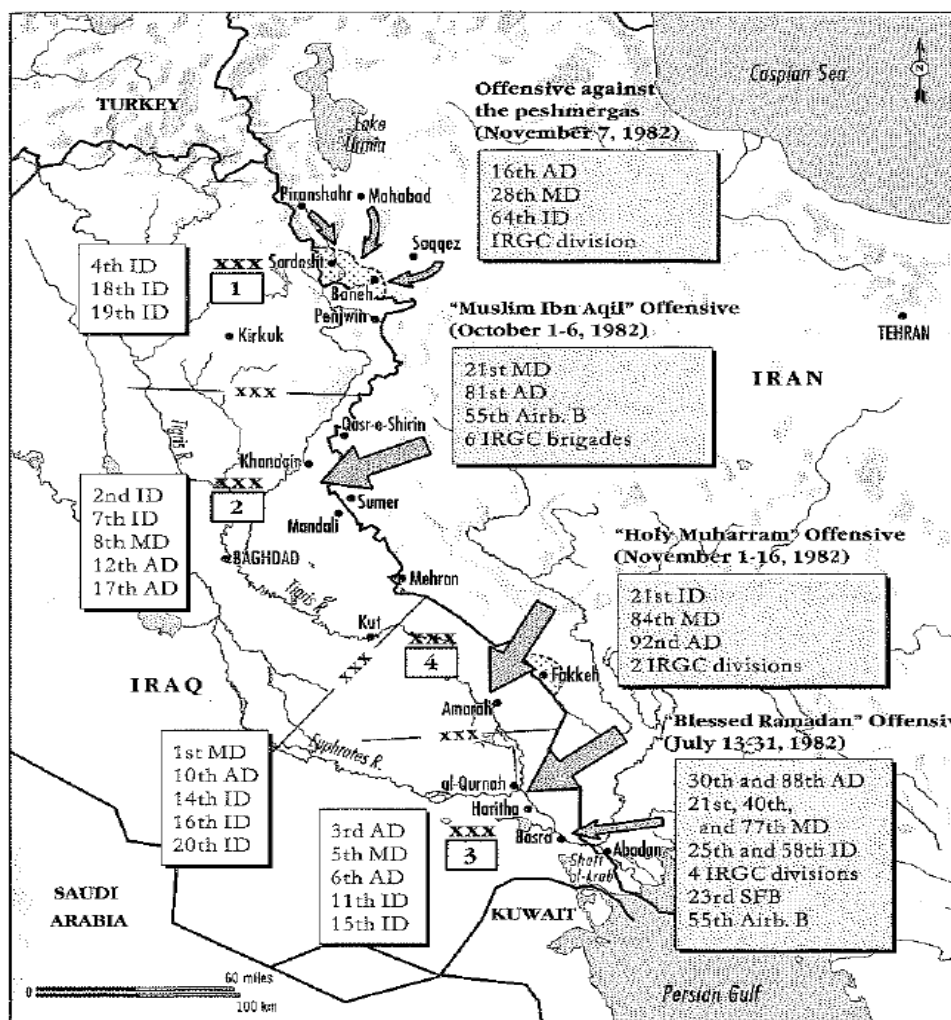
South Lebanon in order to find the assassin, an invasion Iraq did not appreciate. On June 10, Saddam unilaterally entered a ceasefire and accepted the requests from Iran to include the withdrawal from conquered territories, payment of war reparations, recognition of the border as defined by the Algiers Agreement of 1975, acceptance of responsibility for the war, and he even offered Iranian troops access to cross Iraqi territory while on their way to defend their ally, Lebanon, against Israel. Saddam did not, however, step down or repatriate the Shiite population expelled from Iraq prior to the war. King Fahd of Saudi Arabia approved of this proclamation and offered to pay \$50 billion to Iran for war damages, but the Iranians were not impressed. They demanded \$150 billion and pushed the Saudis into a now obvious alliance with Iraq. The Saudis even reached out to the United States and acted as an intermediary as the United States sent precision-guided munitions to Iraq in order to increase their bombing accuracy. This was the first time in the war that US-made equipment was sent to one of the belligerents. Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khomeini staunchly opposed Saddam's attempt at peace and chose to continue the war on June 22. Three weeks later the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 514 to again put an end to the war, and again failed to do so. Despite Baghdad's willingness to cooperate, Tehran chose the path of war.<sup>47</sup>

The month of October 1982 began with the Muslim Ibn Aqil offensive near Qasr-e-Shirin and Sumer in the central region of Iraq. The Iranian objective was to breach Iraqi lines and advance towards Baghdad. Throughout this campaign waves of Iranian soldiers rushed across the border towards the nearby Iraqi towns but were slowed by incapacitating CS gas. The Iranian offensive ended shortly after it begun with nothing to show except for the empty beds of the 6,000 who now laid on the battlefield. The United Nations Security Council again issued a

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<sup>47</sup> Razoux, 217-222.

Resolution (522) proposing that impartial observers be deployed to oversee a ceasefire. Per usual, Iraq accepted the resolution while Iran outright denied their cooperation. Historian Razoux explained the UN Security Council based the resolution on “Chapter 6 of the UN Charter, rather than Chapter 7—which would have allowed the recourse to force – the rejection had no effect beyond exacerbating the international community’s disapproval.” The year came to a close with an escalation to total war as both belligerents began to bomb civilian populations in their enemy’s major cities.<sup>48</sup>



Iranian Offensives from July to November 1982<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Razoux, 233-236.

<sup>49</sup> Razoux, 233.

The new year opened with an uncharacteristic insinuation from the government in Tehran. A published map detailing the front lines showed areas of territory held by Iraqi forces. The document implied that Iran would be willing to negotiate if Iraq evacuated and recognized Iranian control over those areas. Saddam denied this proposition as several of these territories were on Iraqi soil prior to the start of the war however, he offered to travel to Tehran to personally discuss a ceasefire with Ayatollah Khomeini. The Supreme Leader was tempted to speak with Saddam, but Rafsanjani convinced him this decision to compromise would not punish the Iraqi dictator, one of the ultimate goals of the war. Saddam continued his efforts to bring Iran to the negotiating table by calling on the UN, OIC, and the Non-Aligned Movement to pressure Iran to accept the ceasefire in February 1983. On May 25, Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz offered to negotiate an agreement with Iran to stop bombing civilian populations under the guidance of the UN. Iran rejected the offer. On June 7, Saddam requested a one-month truce at the start of Ramadan and was again turned down. The Dawn III Iranian offensive in late summer 1983 resulted in another UN Security Council resolution (540) that demanded an immediate end to hostilities and bombings of civilians. Once again, Iraq accepted while Iran rejected.<sup>50</sup>

The consistent refusals and lack of cooperation from Tehran pushed Saddam to continue a war he was prepared to end. The Dawn IV offensive begun in the fall in Iraqi Kurdistan forced Saddam to deliver more troops to the north to protect Sulaymaniah and key oil fields and retake Penjwin from the Iranians. In addition, Saddam delivered mortar shells containing mustard gas to the Kurdish front where they were deployed against Iranian Pasdaran divisions, pushing them back to their entrenchments at Penjwin. This marked the first time chemical weapons were used in the war and showed that, for Saddam, Iraqi Kurdistan was a line that Iran was not to cross.

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<sup>50</sup> Razoux, 243, 246-48, 252.

Dawn IV ended in November and both sides waited for the spring of 1984 to continue major operations.<sup>51</sup>

On February 22, 1984 Iran launched Operation Kheibar with the goal of seizing the oil fields on the Majnoon Islands and then cut off the road connecting Baghdad and Basra. By February 29 both sides sent all reserves to the islands. Iraqi General Adnan Khairallah inspected the front and decided he needed the Republican Guard, chemical weapons, and a high tension line through the Tigris River and into the marshes around the islands used to electrocute Iranian soldiers wading through the water. PC-7 Turbo Trainer planes given by Switzerland flew over the Iranian forces and sprayed soldiers with tabun nerve gas while Iraqi artillery simultaneously shelled the enemy with mustard gas. Thousands more were killed by the electric current flowing through the surrounding waters. Within ten days the Iraqis were able to recapture most of the territory they lost with the help of these weapons along with phosphorous shells that horrifically burned Iranian soldiers. This offensive resulted in the deaths of 20,000 Iranians and 3,000 Iraqis, followed by 30,000 wounded Iranians compared to 9,000 wounded Iraqis. The Supreme Defense Council in Tehran chose not to follow Rafsanjani's plan to continue human wave offensives, but rather settled on a policy of small-scale trench warfare. Saddam continued to lay low and not retaliate in hopes that the international community would see Iran as the aggressor and Iraq as the new victim.<sup>52</sup>

Events occurring around the region in the 1980s continued to affect the war and its fragile alliance system. The October 23, 1983 attack on US Marine headquarters in Lebanon killed 242 Americans. Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah Shiites claimed the attack. On December 12, the Kuwait embassy was also bombed by Kuwaiti Shiites backed by Iran. In response, the United

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<sup>51</sup> Razoux, 252-254.

<sup>52</sup> Razoux, 264-270.

States launched Operation Staunch which threatened American allies economically if they chose to supply Iran with any weapons or ammunition. After the capture and torture of William Buckley, CIA station chief in Beirut in March 1984, the United States strengthened relations with Iraq, pledged to reopen embassies that year, and offered to finance the war. Still the United States was not willing to supply Iraq with weapons. In November of the same year, President Reagan announced National Security Decision Directive 114 which began plans to protect American interests in the Gulf and to save Iraq by any legal means to include the restoration of diplomatic relations between Baghdad and Washington if necessary. The United States provided Iraq with satellite imagery and data received by its Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and electronic surveillance planes patrolling the Gulf region. In turn, Iran began a series of kidnappings of civilians and government officials from countries supporting Iraq in some way, to include the United States, France, and Britain. As a result, only four nations were willing to support Iran openly: Syria, Libya, China, and North Korea. These four only met one third of Iran's war needs, but Tehran managed to use threats and payoffs to secure the remaining support from twenty-five other nations. On the other hand, Iraq held weapons contracts with thirty countries led by the Soviet Union, France and China which covered 85 percent of Iraq's needs. Ireland was the only nation in Europe able to keep its hands completely clean as every other country found a way to sell military equipment to one of the two belligerents.<sup>53</sup>

It is critical to note that some of Iraq's contracts included the sale of chemical weapons and materials. The Soviet Union provided an improved version of World War I mustard gas, Spain sold Baghdad containers meant for spreading chemical products, and Egypt sent large amounts of empty artillery shells that could be filled with gas. Germany, Belgium, Denmark, the

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<sup>53</sup> Razoux, 274-281, 290-294.

Netherlands, and Lebanon all provided chemical substances to Baghdad, although perhaps without knowing that Iraq's chemical weapon program had taken off in terms of the development of neurotoxic agents. Large stockpiles were created, conditions for the use of chemicals in military operations were laid out, and "life-size" experiments were even conducted in which the effectiveness of tabun was tried on an Iraqi battalion. The results were as expected.<sup>54</sup>

Iran jumped at the opportunity to destroy Iraq's international image by citing their use of chemical weapons as a violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925. Iraq replied with an accusation of Iranian mistreatment of prisoners of war. The International Committee of the Red Cross ruled that Iraqi prisoners were being tortured and held in rotting prison camps without making a decision on the use of chemical weapons. Iran continued the fight and went to the UN Security Council by sending gas victims to European hospitals. A delegation of experts was sent to Iran and confirmed that Baghdad was using chemical weapons and poison gas. Iraq denied the evidence at first but eventually admitted to the use of these weapons, claiming their right to use anything to defend their own territory. They also promised they would only use the gas on the battlefield and not against civilians. The UN Security Council tried to pass a resolution in March 1984 that would declare Iraq's usage as wrong, but the United States and Soviet Union vetoed it. Washington wanted to show Iraq their support, and Moscow did not want to set a precedent against the usage of chemical weapons as they were using them in Afghanistan at the same time. Again a United Nations resolution failed to make an impact on the war. Still, Iran chose not to participate in the manufacture and employment of chemical weapons as its leaders believed it went against Koranic principles, would further isolate them, and would give Iraq an excuse to launch their stockpiles on Iranian soldiers.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Razoux, 298-299.

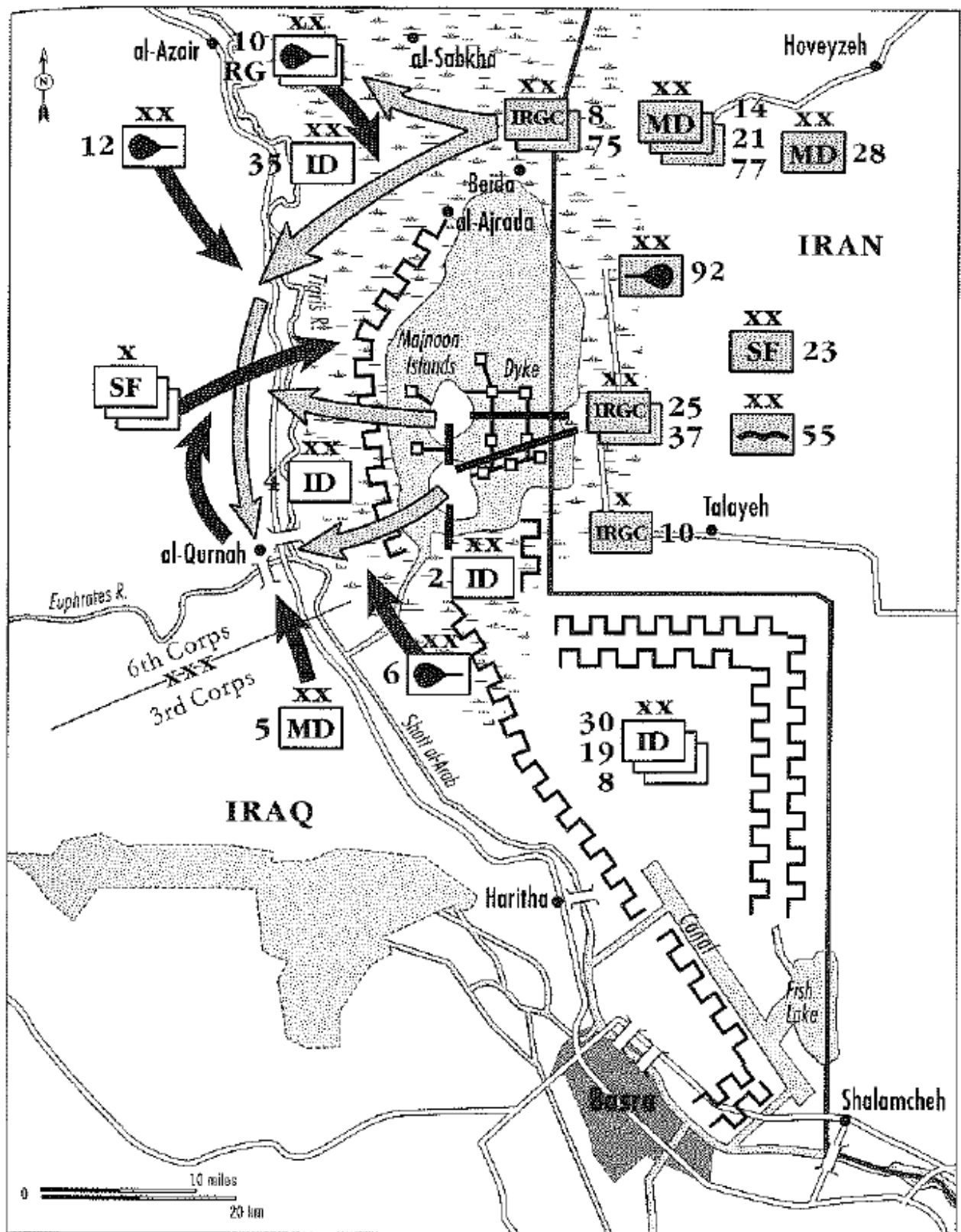
<sup>55</sup> Razoux, 299-301.

Trends continued into 1985 as Iran's Badr offensive resulted in a successful assault that was in turn beaten back by Iraqi counterattacks supplemented by chemical weapons. In April, Saddam called for another ceasefire after a second war of the cities killed hundreds of civilians. Again, Saddam requested an end of civilian bombings, a withdrawal of both armies to the border, an exchange of all prisoners of war, and negotiations for war reparations. Significantly, Iraq did not mention the Shatt al-Arab potentially implying that Baghdad was willing to surrender their claim on the waterway in order to end the war. Iran, however, required the removal of Saddam from leadership and the repatriation of Iraqi Shiite refugees in Iran. As a result, both sides continued bombings until a June 15 truce was confirmed under the oversight of UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and an end to civilian bombings was reached. Nevertheless, Iran continued its ground war, albeit with little success, through Operations Jerusalem 1 through Jerusalem 6 and Operation Fath.<sup>56</sup>

Iran's early winter campaigns began again in February 1986 with the Dawn 8 offensive. The target was the al-Faw peninsula in the south of Iraq with the goal of blocking Iraqi access to the Gulf and its oil resources, as well as open a path to Basra. Because of the importance of these objectives Saddam authorized the use of chemical weapons again. Iraq utilized mustard and sarin gas in a February 12 attack that resulted in 8,500 casualties. The Fatma e-Zahra hospital treating wounded soldiers and civilians was bombed repeatedly and caused the casualty toll to rise to nearly twelve thousand. Despite these losses, the Iranian soldiers were not prevented from taking the peninsula in four days. Four days later the Iraqi counterattack

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<sup>56</sup> Gary Sick, "A Chance to End the Iran-Iraq War," *New York Times*, June 13, 1985, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/06/13/opinion/a-chance-to-end-the-iran-iraq-war.html>; Hiltermann, 65-68; Razoux, 322-327.



Iranian Badr Offensive (March 11-22, 1985)<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Razoux, 323.



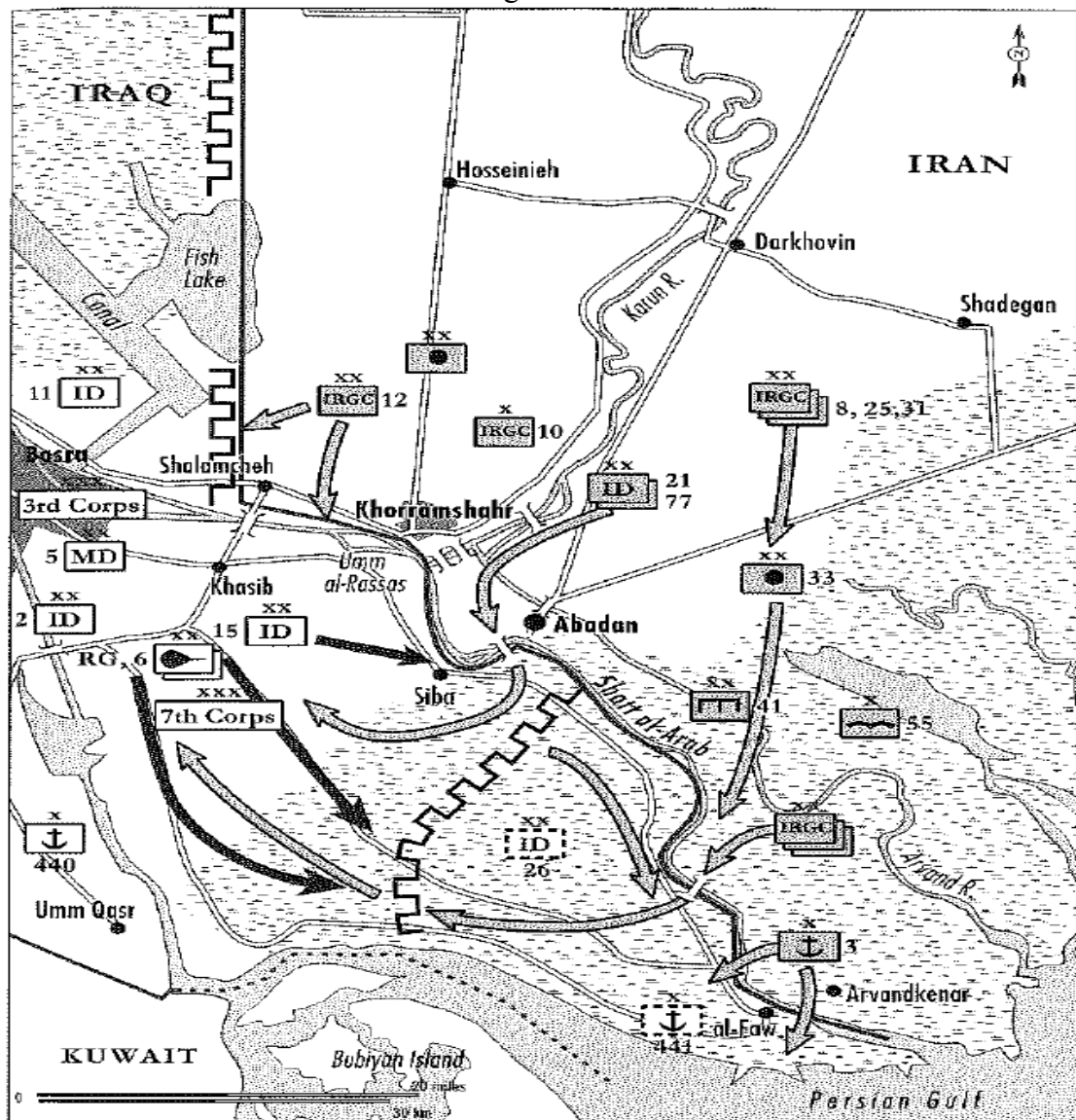
regained twelve miles of territory on the peninsula with the help of continued chemical and traditional artillery shelling. The use of these weapons was confirmed by United States Defense Intelligence Agency analyst Rick Francona who was working as the as the Iraqi Military Intelligence liaison. Francona traveled to the combat zone where he “personally picked up used atropine injectors off the battlefield and from captured Iranian vehicles.” He continued, “I personally observed Iraqi attempts to decontaminate captured Iranian equipment – no need to do so unless they knew they had used chemicals.” This implied Iraq used VX gas for the first time in the war. Within a week the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 582 and called for an immediate ceasefire followed by international arbitration of all aspects of the conflict. This resolution was passed because Iran had taken the peninsula and it appeared that Iraq may actually fall to the Islamic Revolutionary movement. As usual, Iraq accepted the resolution. A day later, Iran launched Dawn 9 in Kurdistan in an attempt to seize Sulaymaniah and Halabja, thereby rejecting the proposed ceasefire.<sup>58</sup>

On July 16, 1986 Saddam Hussein had himself reelected as secretary general of the Ba’ath Party and president of the Revolutionary Command Council as a way to show Iran the people supported him. A week later he sent a letter to Tehran offering the chance at an honorable peace, but Iran declined. The year also included the destruction of the oil industry in both countries, a stalemate on both ground and air by the end of the year, and the first time the United States publicly condemned Iraq’s use of chemical weapons. These events may have characterized 1986 however, the Iran-Contra affair overshadowed them all and its effects altered

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<sup>58</sup> Hiltermann, 70-72, 139-141; Patrick E. Tyler, “Officers Say U.S. Aided Iraq in War Despite Use of Gas,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2002, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/18/world/officers-say-us-aided-iraq-in-war-despite-use-of-gas.html>; Razoux, 353-355, 357.

the course of the Iran-Iraq War. At the direction of the National Security Council and President Reagan, the CIA constructed a trade network between Iran, Israel, and the Contras fighting the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua without consulting Congress. Through Israel the United States sent Iran 2,500 TOW anti-tank missiles and 300 Hawk anti-air missiles in return for the release of just three hostages held in Lebanon and finances to send to the Contras fighting communism in Latin America. A leak to the Lebanese magazine *Ash-*



The Iranians Capture al-Faw (February 9-March 11, 1986)<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Razoux, 353.

*Shiraa* on November 3, 1986 revealed the secret American involvement and shipment of weapons to Iran. Saddam was furious the United States was dealing to both nations, especially when he discovered the CIA had given Tehran satellite imagery showing Iraqi locations on the front. These images had helped Iran capture the al-Faw peninsula the year before. Still, Saddam played a diplomatic role and took advantage of American guilt as he asked for more financial assistance and intelligence reports. Washington agreed to provide more imagery and data to Baghdad and also turned a blind eye to Iraq's growing use of chemical weapons.<sup>60</sup>

As the sixth year of the war drew to a close Ayatollah Khomeini released a fatwa asking the armed forces to defeat Iraq by Norwuz, the Persian New Year, on March 21, 1987 because the war was becoming counterproductive and costly. Speaker of Parliament, Rafsanjani, chose to begin immediately and launched Operation Karbala 4 on Christmas Eve night 1986. The frontal attack launched at the city of Basra was repelled by the motivated Iraqi lines who knew the city's safety rested directly on their shoulders. Rafsanjani's plan had failed within seventy-two hours and had cost Iran eight thousand soldiers. His political career was on the line, and in typical fashion he tried to save it with another offensive on Basra. This time he chose to commit "every available combatant to the battle" so that "the fight would be all-out and merciless." Karbala 5 commenced on January 8, 1987 and was successful in bringing the Iranians to the Jasseem Canal, just ten miles from Basra, and in bringing Saddam to the front to check on his defenses. Here he gave the orders to again use chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers to prevent them from taking the city. Four days later, Karabla 6 was launched further north in the vicinity of Sumer in an attempt to take the city of Mandali (which controlled the road to Baghdad), and force Iraqi reserves away from Basra. By January 21 the front near Basra

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<sup>60</sup> Razoux, 367, 377-379, 382-86.

stabilized and Saddam issued a radio broadcast announcing his plan for comprehensive peace between the two nations. His main principles included the complete withdrawal of armed forces to internationally recognized borders, the exchange of all prisoners of war, the signing of a nonaggression treaty, and a promise to stay out of the other's internal affairs. Two days later, Iran rejected the plan again requiring that Saddam step down.<sup>61</sup>

Iran's failure to negotiate an end to the war meant they needed to win before the Persian New Year. A 150,000-man force replenished the Iranian lines at the Jassem Canal allowing them to cross and move within seven miles of the city. As a last line of defense, Iraq shelled the enemy's encampments and flew Ilyushin 76 four-engine jets high above the battlefield to release pallets of napalm. This gas horribly burned Iranian soldiers, but the human wave assaults continued until February 26 when they ran out of ammunition and motivation. A Karbala 7 offensive in Kurdistan in early March failed to crush the Iraqi regime and ended hopes of defeating Iraq in time to meet the Ayatollah Khomeini's deadline. Still, the war waged on and Karbala 8 was initiated a month later as Pasdaran forces again tried to reach Basra. The significant part of this offensive came between April 9 and April 12 as Iranian artillery poured phosgene gas on the Iraqi 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Corps defending the city. This marked the first time Iranian leaders went against their religious principles and utilized chemical weapons. Although relatively ineffective, it killed twenty and wounded two hundred, it led Iraqi intelligence to investigate Iranian chemical activities. The search revealed Iran was developing tabun gas in Marvdasht near Shiraz with North Korean help. In retaliation, the Iraqis dropped mustard gas on the Iranians outside of Basra. In mid-April the Iranians ended the assaults on Basra. Historian Razoux observed, "The exhausted Iranian army no longer had the necessary resources to

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<sup>61</sup> Razoux, 390-395.

maintain these costly all-out offensives. The Iraqi army was probably not ready to go back on the offensive, but it was strong enough to durably resist Iranian military pressure. The stalemate on the terrestrial front was total.”<sup>62</sup>

The Supreme Defense Council in Tehran returned to their previous strategy of attrition and so began a war situated heavily in the Persian Gulf. Naval and air strikes against oil tankers were common from both sides with Iraq hoping to hurt Iran’s financial ability to restock weapons and ammunition while Iran hoped to hurt the oil industry in the Gulf monarchies and force them to encourage Saddam to step down. In July, Saddam unilaterally prohibited attacks in the Gulf to incentivize Iran to accept the peace plan proposed by the United Nations Security Council on June 23. This plan was similar to Saddam’s 1986 proposal as it demanded an immediate end to hostilities, the withdrawal of troops to international borders, and the exchange of prisoners of war. It also required mediation by the United Nations Secretary General. Additionally, this plan called for an impartial organization to investigate the origins of the war and recognized Iran’s right to war reparations. On July 20, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 598 which included this peace plan and sent a team of impartial observers to oversee a ceasefire if accepted by both sides. For the first time, Iran did not reject the resolution outright. They now needed a way out of the war, and since their attrition strategy had not worked the resolution was the next best option. Still, Tehran did not accept the plan and a ceasefire did not come to fruition.<sup>63</sup>

The first seven years of the war are characterized by this trend of non-binding resolutions being called for and accepted by one belligerent and then rejected by the other. The vast majority of these occurrences come from Iraq’s willingness to negotiate and Iran’s steadfast

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<sup>62</sup> Hiltermann 79; Razoux, 395-400.

<sup>63</sup> Razoux, 401-402, 411.

denial throughout the years 1982 to 1987. The lack of international authority and the inflexibility of the Ayatollah Khomeini allowed the war to continue and led to horrific battlefields littered with bodies of soldiers who were often victims of a variety of chemical agents. Sadly, the worst of these attacks was yet to come.

## THE HALABJA MASSACRE AND ANFAL CAMPAIGN

Saddam's decision to employ gas as a weapon was a calculated decision allowing "the Iraqis to kill the maximum number of enemy at the lowest unit cost." Inflicting casualties on armed enemies of the regime can be understood through wartime logic. Collateral damage and the impact of the war on civilians is often overlooked as a secondary issue and regarded simply as the cost of war. It is more complex however, when groups of civilians within the regime's borders become the enemy and take up arms to assist the opposition. Saddam Hussein was forced to address this issue as the Iraqi Kurdistan population alternated allegiances throughout the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>64</sup>

The history of the Kurds in Iraq is equally as complex. The Kurdish people cannot be identified solely by certain ethnic or linguistic characteristics. They share no common dialect, religion, homeland, or origin. The Arabs discovered the term "Kurd" when they conquered Mesopotamia in the seventh century and the word has remained to define the nomadic people in the region ever since. Traditionally, the region inhabited by the Kurds included the mountains near the borders of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, but they have never had their own independent state with their own sovereign borders. During Great Britain's control over Iraq following the First World War, Winston Churchill kept the Kurdistan region under the close supervision of a British High Commissioner because he feared the minority would be oppressed by the surrounding Arab leaders. In 1921, he returned some power to the Kurds when he "agreed the Kurdish areas should be included in Iraq and should participate in the National Assembly" yet

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<sup>64</sup> Hiltermann, 26.

still have local autonomy. When Iraq received its independence in 1932 it joined the League of Nations under the condition that it must protect the rights of the Kurdish people as a minority group in their new state.<sup>65</sup>

These changes allowed the growth of Kurdish political movements in Iraq. The Kurdistan Democratic Party was established by Mullah Mustafa Barzani, a young Kurdish leader who began the Kurdish national movement after the fall of the British monarchy. He was exiled to Iran in 1945 and from there created the KDP. After his return in 1958 he re-launched his nationalist campaign in 1961 which gained momentum in the power vacuum left by the British. The new and weak Ba'ath regime permitted the Kurdish regional government some autonomy in 1968, but revoked that autonomy after a dispute over the oil-rich lands near Kirkuk. The Kurdish revolt in regards to control of Kirkuk in 1974 led the Shah of Iran, previously the Kurds' main ally, to make a deal with Baghdad and withdraw his support for the KDP.<sup>66</sup> This loss split the KDP into Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the remainder of Barzani's KDP. As the two largest political parties in Kurdistan, both played a large role in the war. The KDP sided with Iran, and the PUK initially sided with Iraq, but they later joined Iran as well in 1985.<sup>67</sup>

Kurdish involvement in the war began early as Iranian offensives entered Kurdistan shortly after Tehran took the initiative in 1982. They assisted the Iranian Val-Fajr II offensive in

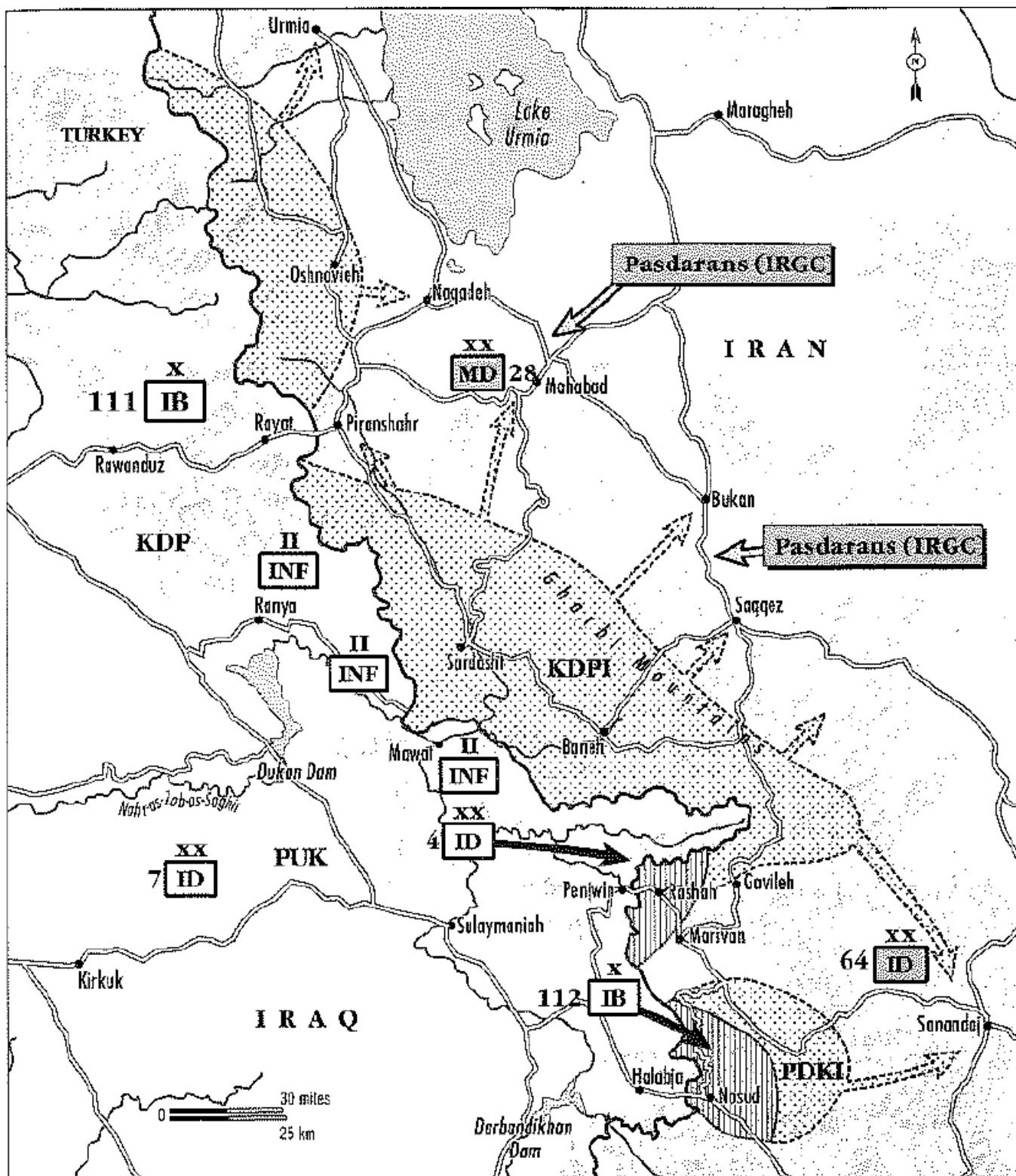
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<sup>65</sup> Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present, and Future* (London: Pluto Press: Kurdish Human Rights Project, 2007), 7, 11-14.

<sup>66</sup> The Shah of Iran, as well as the United States and Israel backed the Kurdish people at this time because they preferred to have Iraq distracted and focused on internal matters rather than on challenging Iran in the Middle East. These alliances and relations obviously changed with the Islamic Revolution and overthrow of the Shah by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The deal referred to in this section is the 1975 Algiers Agreements previously discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>67</sup> Hiltermann, 85-90; Murray and Woods, 21-23.





Kurdish Front in the Spring of 1981<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Razoux, 159.

July and August 1983 in an attempt to drive out Iranian Kurdish rebels belonging to Abd-al-Rahman Qasemlou's Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I). The Iran-KDP-allied attack and capture of Haj Omran on the Iran-Iraq border in July led to retaliatory chemical weapons strikes by Saddam Hussein. As punishment for their assistance to the Iranian offensive, the Ba'ath regime rounded up five to eight thousand of the Barzani tribe of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). These Kurds were never seen again. When asked later about the disappearances, Saddam simply commented, "They betrayed the country and the covenant so we punished them severely and they went to hell."<sup>69</sup>

Kurdish operations continued in the north for the remainder of the war, and the alliance against Baghdad grew stronger. In October 1986, the PUK and its new Iranian allies dealt a blow to the Iraqis with an attack on Kirkuk, simultaneously sending a message of their alliance. Then, under pressure from Iran in the spring of 1987, the KDP and PUK released each other's prisoners, reconciled their differences from thirteen years ago, and united as the Kurdistan Front. The new coalition retook the region given to them in the 1974 Ba'ath autonomy agreement, led protests, harassed convoys and initiated attacks on cities. The PUK was significantly involved in Operations Fath 4 through Operation Fath 7 on Erbil, Sulaymaniah Kirkuk, Mosul, while the KDP worked with Iran in Operation Karbala 7 as well as through the skirmishes on Iraqi garrisons near Rawanduz, Haj Omran, and Zakho on the border.<sup>70</sup>

On April 9, 1987 Saddam's presidential convoy was attacked resulting in the death of his chauffeur and ten guards. Saddam himself escaped unharmed, but came to realize his approach

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<sup>69</sup> Hiltermann, 29-31.

<sup>70</sup> Hiltermann, 91-94; Razoux, 411-412.

in Kurdistan was not effective. In response, Saddam initiated the Anfal Campaign<sup>71</sup> and appointed his cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid, as the leader of the Northern Bureau in Kirkuk. Chemical Ali, as he became known, chose to breakdown the relationship between the insurgents and the civilians who supported them through the use of gas. He depopulated the countryside through a village demolition campaign, and planned to “use gas to flush villagers from their homes, gather them up, take them to faraway sites, and dispose of them – bury them under the desert sands and thereby end the Kurdish rebellion forever.”<sup>72</sup>

Historian and author of *A Poisonous Affair*, Joost Hiltermann, described the Anfal campaign accurately and relayed its harsh realities. “A counterinsurgency operation launched by the Saddam Hussein regime in the waning days of the Iran-Iraq war to decisively settle its Kurdish problem, the Anfal campaign led to the methodical murder of tens of thousands of Kurdish civilians—first flushed out of their villages by poison gas, then hauled to transit centers, sorted by age and sex, and carted off to execution sites in Iraq’s western desert, far from Kurdistan,” he wrote. These attacks were intended to harass and kill armed Kurdish forces, punish civilians who supported these forces, and instill so much terror in the population that citizens would flee into the open arms of the Iraqi army for transportation to one of the nearby mass graves.<sup>73</sup>

Chemical Ali launched the first gas attack on Iraqi, rather than Iranian, forces in the Balisan Valley on April 16, 1987. A survivor of this attack explained:

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<sup>71</sup> The Anfal Campaign was an aggressive scorched earth policy launched by Saddam Hussein in 1987 as a retaliation against the Kurdish people fighting against the Ba’ath Regime. Anfal, which literally means “the spoils” references the eighth Sura of the Koran in which Allah authorizes warriors to take the land of their adversaries.

<sup>72</sup> Hiltermann, 91-94; Razoux, 413-414

<sup>73</sup> Hiltermann, xii, 198.

It was like a fog. And then everyone became blind. Some vomited. Faces turned black; people experienced painful swellings under the arm, and women under their breasts. Later, a yellow watery discharge would ooze from the eyes and nose. Many of those who survived suffered severe vision disturbances, or total blindness for up to a month ... Some villagers ran into the mountains and died there. Others, who had been closer to the place of impact of the bombs, died where they stood.<sup>74</sup>

A second survivor and mother reported her experience from the attack:

My daughter Narjis came to me, complaining about pain in her eyes, chest and stomach. When I got close to see what was wrong with her, she threw up all over me ... When I took her in to wash her face ... all my other children were throwing up ... Then my condition got bad, too. And that's when we realized that the weapon was poisonous and chemical. I went for four days without eyesight. My children could not see. I was just screaming. On the fifth day I slightly opened my eyes. And it was a terrible scene. My children and my skin had turned black.<sup>75</sup>

These stories are testaments to the horrors Saddam Hussein, Chemical Ali, and the Ba'ath Regime created during the war.

Two months later Chemical Ali issued new standing orders from the city of Kirkuk. These orders established prohibited localities or zones and instructed any human or animal found within these zones to be killed on site. His second order, Directive SF/4800 on June 20, commanded his ranks to carry out as many "special" artillery strikes (implying gas attacks) as possible in these areas. In addition, he dictated, "All persons captured in those villages shall be

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<sup>74</sup> Michael J. Kelly, "The Anfal Trial Against Saddam Hussein," *Journal of Genocide Research* 9, no. 2 (June 2007): 236, accessed February 19, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=20&sid=5f8ac396-494f-47c1-b486-52adeaeae38b%40sessionmgr103>.

<sup>75</sup> Kelly, 238.

detained and interrogated by the security services and those between the ages of 15 and 70 shall be executed after any useful information has been obtained from them.” Ali’s campaign destroyed Kurdish villages, executed Kurds found with weapons regardless of a lack of evidence of rebel affiliation, bombed or shelled cities prior to their complete evacuation, prohibited the teaching of Kurdish in schools, and instilled heavy sanctions on anyone caught speaking the language.<sup>76</sup>

By the end of the war, civilians across Kurdistan experienced the cruel and inhumane Anfal assaults. Though all the attacks were gruesome and horrific, the attack on Halabja in March 1988 may top the list. Kurdish resistance had controlled a large swath of land from Suleimaniyeh to Kirkuk a year earlier and with support from Iran, planned an offensive aimed at seizing Halabja. Halabja offered multiple advantages for the Iranians. An attack in the north would reduce pressure on their forces in the south and help relations with the Gulf States, but would also allow Iran to grab territory in Iraq before the war ended, fight Iranian Kurdish rebels who used Iraqi Kurdistan as a base of operations, and allow the Kurds to take most of the casualties in the assault.<sup>77</sup>

These Kurds had laid siege to Saddam’s regime, using guerilla warfare to strike the party headquarters, secret police, military intelligence, and other Iraqi assets for years, and were prepared to make a larger strike at Halabja. The town, easily defendable once secured, was surrounded by mountains in the southeast and shielded to the north and west by man-made defenses like Lake Sirwan and natural ones like the Zalm River. On March 13, 1988 Iranian Generals Sohrabi and Shirazi launched a two-pronged offensive into the region. Operation Victory 7 had the objective of seizing the Dukan Dam just twenty miles north of Sulaymaniah

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<sup>76</sup> Hiltermann, 99; Razoux, 413-414.

<sup>77</sup> Hiltermann, xx-xxi, 105-108.

while the mission of Operation Holy City 3 was to seize Halabja in order to prevent access to the Darbandikhan Dam to the town's south. By taking both of Iraq's largest hydroelectric dams, Iran hoped to divest Iraq of its electricity. KDP units with help from Iranian Pasdaran forces secured the bridge across the Zalm, the only escape route from Halabja, while Pasdaran and PUK forces took strategic mountaintops from the Iraqis and defeated Iraqi troops guarding the large artillery base at Delmar, the main threat to Halabja. Through these efforts the Iranian coalition forces managed to take Halabja by March 15.<sup>78</sup>

The following day, Saddam executed Colonel Jafar Sadeq who had retreated from the Dukan Dam as well as other officers who had lost him Halabja. Fearing that Iran would cut off Iraq's electricity, poison the water supply, or flood the region Saddam ordered Ali to intensify the Anfal Campaign and erase the town of Halabja with chemical attacks. Saddam wanted to kill as many Kurdish rebels and Iranian soldiers as he could, regardless of the effect on the rest of the population. Audiotapes from the middle of a meeting between Saddam and his council are incriminating as Saddam is heard repeatedly yelling, "Kill them all!" On March 16, Saddam's strikes began. Ten MiG-23s flew over Halabja and dropped containers of napalm creating both a wall of fire within and around the city. Shortly after, several Pilatus aircraft followed and unleashed a violent cocktail of chemical agents that included mustard, phosgene, tabun, and sarin gas. Artillery shells continued to raze the city for hours. Eyewitness and survivor, Hama Hama Sa'id, claimed, "he saw six Soviet-made Sukhoy bombers fly over, then another three separately, and another two. They dropped their bombs over Halabja. 'Smoke rose: some was white, some black, some red, some mixed. I saw people putting their hands over their faces.'" These individuals probably never raised their hands again. Conventional bombings first decimated

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<sup>78</sup> Hiltermann xix; Razoux, 437.

structures and broke windows, allowing the next waves of poison gas bombs to easily penetrate into shelters. The excruciatingly painful deaths of its victims are seen in photographs taken after the event and before the remains of the Kurds could be collected off the roads leading out of Halabja and placed in mass graves. Indra Sinha cites a *Washington Times* article in her research that recounts “A father [who] died trying to protect his child from the white cloud of cyanide vapor. A mother [who] lies cradling her baby alongside a minibus [...] Yards away, a mother, father, and daughter lie side by side.” In total, it is estimated three to five thousand individuals died at Halabja with an additional 10,000 wounded from the attack.<sup>79</sup>

It is important to note that apart from reconnaissance and intelligence officers, Iranian troops were not in the town prior to the chemical attack. Saddam Hussein chose to use sarin gas in a town he knew contained a majority of Iraqi citizens, Kurdish or not. Hiltermann explains, “Regardless of Iran’s role, Iraq consciously and deliberately retaliated with a poison gas attack against a civilian population, a crime against humanity that cannot be justified by the defeat of its ground forces.” The several thousand casualties sustained during the Halabja attack once again called for international intervention.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Hiltermann, 120-121; Indra Sinha, “Chemicals for War and Chemicals for Peace: Poison Gas in Bhopal, India, and Halabja, Kurdistan, Iraq,” *Social Justice* 41 (January 2014): 126, accessed February 20, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=18&sid=5f8ac396-494f-47c1-b486-52adeaeae38b%40sessionmgr103>; Sharat G. Lin, “US Lying about Halabja: Justifying the Invasion of Iraq,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 36 (September 2007): 3628, accessed February 19, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40276361>; Razoux, 437-439.

<sup>80</sup> Hiltermann, 123-124.

## THE AMERICAN RESPONSE TO HALABJA

The fact the international community, and specifically the United States, failed to take action against the Iraqi regime and execute the necessary measures to prevent the use of chemical weapons is appalling and shameful to an outsider looking in. Surely, this inaction, at a minimum, indirectly contributed to the attacks on Halabja. Should these nations have done something to control Saddam's military actions? Why did the United States government not take responsibility and condemn Baghdad? Did the American public agree with the government's indifferent stance? Regardless of the political and diplomatic reasons for inaction, is it ever acceptable for world leaders to allow the continuance of what some argue was genocide? International relations and discipline is always a complex subject and one that is further complicated when the actions under investigation occur internally within a sovereign nation's own borders. This chapter argues the United States' and United Nations' failure to effectively condemn Iraq's use of poison gas against Iran prior to 1988 led to Saddam's willingness to launch the Anfal campaign against the Kurds and drop mustard and tabun gas on Halabja. Additionally, the lack of punishment after the war gave Saddam the confidence to invade Kuwait just three years later.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) first discovered the use of chemical weapons in the war in August 1983 against Iranian soldiers and members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party at Haj Omran and Penjwin. At this point, the United States had provided Iraq with intelligence on Iranian troop movements, launched Operation Staunch, and extended credit to help with Iraq's financial crisis, but had not restored diplomatic relations with Baghdad. If Washington



was to condemn the violation of the Geneva Protocol one may imagine this would be the appropriate time. Yet, these relations were not reestablished as the Reagan Administration preferred to keep the option on the table. An immediate condemnation or announcement that ending the use of chemical weaponry was required for Baghdad and Washington to restore relations would have ensured there would be no relations at all. It would kill any diplomatic reestablishment. Resolution 540, issued by the UN in October 1983, simply encouraged both belligerents to end hostilities under the Secretary General's mediation, denounced all humanitarian rights violations, and urged all nations to refrain from actions that would escalate the war. Typically, UN resolutions are considered non-binding and require the consent of all parties involved in order to be enforced. Only resolutions passed under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter allow the Security Council to employ military force in order to implement their decisions. Despite the adoption of numerous voluntary resolutions, the Security Council never passed a resolution under Chapter Seven during the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>81</sup>

As a result, Resolution 540 was never enforced and Saddam assumed he had been given the signal for the continued use of chemical weapons. When Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in December 1983 he failed to firmly explain the United States' concerns over chemical weapons use, war escalation, and human rights violations. This nonchalant approach to the meeting may have also encouraged Saddam to believe Washington would turn a blind eye to his tactics. On February 21, 1984, Iraqi high

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<sup>81</sup> "CIA Confirms Iraq Used Nerve Agent," Scribd, March 23, 1984, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.scribd.com/document/163048832/CIA-Confirms-Iraq-Used-Nerve-Agent>; Zach Fredman, "Shoring Up Iraq, 1983 to 1990: Washington and the Chemical Weapons Controversy," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23, no. 3 (September 2012): 537, accessed February 18, 2019, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=c40e7ccd-162d-4efe89398a498fef0bec%40sessionmgr4010>.

command announced, “the invaders [Iran] should know that for every harmful insect there is an insecticide capable of annihilating it whatever their number and that Iraq possesses this annihilation insecticide.” This comment, given voluntarily by Iraq, allowed the United States to now publically discuss the use of chemical warfare in the conflict. The State Department Country Officer for Iraq at the time, Francis Ricciardone, later explained Washington knew about chemical attacks and the shipment of chemicals from West Germany to Iraq prior to Christmas 1983 yet said nothing publically to protect the sources. He believed the use of chemical warfare would cause conflict escalation in the region and limit the ability of the United States to help Iraq internationally, but now that the news was out, the United States could freely condemn the use of poison gas by Iraq which they did on March 5, 1984.<sup>82</sup>

The March 1984 condemnation of chemical weapons use resulted in a series of diplomatic actions between the United States and Iraq. Baghdad immediately fired back at the United States arguing they were “hypocritical...the last country with the right to speak about the ethics of war” in reference to the United States use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II. About the same time, United Nations’ investigators discovered the remains of ten aerial bombs along the Iran-Iraq border. Nine of these were damaged but were believed to be bombs designed to spread some type of liquid. The remaining bomb had not exploded and the yellow band around the nose cone was still visible. After being dismantled and examined in Tehran the shells were revealed to have a “dark brown, oily liquid” inside that tested positive for mustard gas. Another sample was sent to Sweden and Switzerland where scientists discovered both mustard and tabun gas. With this knowledge, Secretary Rumsfeld returned to Aziz on March 26 to ease tensions. He promised, “Our CW [chemical weapons]

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<sup>82</sup> Hiltermann, 14, 38-40, 48, 50.

condemnation was made strictly out of our strong opposition to the use of lethal and incapacitating CW, wherever it occurs ... Our interest in (1) preventing an Iranian victory, and (2) continuing to improve bilateral relations with Iraq, at a pace of Iraq's choosing, remain unchanged.” The National Security Decision Directive 139 confirmed on April 5 further tilted Washington's allegiance towards Iraq. The document stated, “The Secretary of State, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, will prepare a plan of action designed to avert an Iraqi collapse,” and will do so by evaluating Iraqi military needs, providing improved intelligence, and encouraging allies like France and Jordan to do the same. The Directive continued by pledging American support to the Geneva Protocol, condemning the use of chemical weapons, and stating, “Our condemnation of the use of CW munitions by the belligerents should place equal stress on the urgent need to dissuade Iran from continuing the ruthless and inhumane tactics which have characterized recent offensives.”<sup>83</sup>

Despite a widespread international ban on the export of certain key chemicals (strictly precursors to poison gases)<sup>84</sup> to either belligerent, the United States and Iraq reestablished diplomatic relations in November 1984. When Secretary of State George Shultz and Tariq Aziz met, Shultz reminded his counterpart of the United States' stance on chemical weapons and that his concerns not only applied to Iraq but to the war as a whole. Still, Washington believed chemical weapons to be a lesser evil than the spread of the Islamic Revolution throughout the Middle East. When Iraq conducted tabun attacks during the 1985 Iranian Badr Offensive along

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<sup>83</sup> Eliot Marshall, “Iraq's Chemical Warfare: Case Proved,” *Science* 224, no. 4645 (April 1984): 130-132, accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1692188>; Hiltermann, 51-52; National Security Decision Directive 139, *Measures to Improve U.S. Posture and Readiness to Respond to Developments in the Iran-Iraq War*, Washington, DC, April 5, 1984, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-139.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> This list first included only five chemicals: potassium fluoride, dimethyl methylphosphate, methylphosphonyl difluoride, phosphorous oxychloride, and thioglycol. Iraq had just ordered substantial amounts of these chemicals in 1984 but were denied because of this ban. Each chemical has its own legitimate use, but can also be used to make chemical weapons.

the Baghdad-Basra highway, Shultz privately pressured Aziz, but remained cautious when issuing any statements to the public. State Department spokesman, Bernard Kalb, put it simply, “The Iraqi government is aware of the fact that the US government strongly condemns the lethal use of chemical weapons” and went on to cite the proof of Iraqi violations provided by European doctors sent to treat Iranian victims in 1985. The lack of effective international response to Tehran’s call for help led Iranian United Nations envoy, Sa’id Rajaie Khorassani, to believe, “the UN was so preoccupied with bringing about a ceasefire that it was willing to overlook a serious breach of international law, and that perhaps it even believed that gas use, however disturbing, might help bring the war to an end.”<sup>85</sup>

The year 1986 proved to be a difficult time in the realm of international relations. That spring, misinformed United States’ intelligence notified Saddam that the Iranian attack near the al-Faw peninsula was only a diversion and the main attack would come further north. Saddam’s transfer of troops in accordance with this intelligence resulted in the loss of the peninsula, which was truly Tehran’s mission. Saddam’s subsequent doubt of the United States’ loyalty was deepened when the news of the Iran-Contra Affair broke in November of the same year. President Reagan attempted to explain the weapons sold to Iran were defensive and were not intended to give Iran an advantage or prolong the war. Regardless, with the United States’ embarrassment and morality in question, Washington was less likely to criticize any of Saddam’s military choices, especially when one could claim that, so far, Iraq had only used poison gas *defensively* to counter aggressive Iranian offensives.<sup>86</sup>

In turn, the late 1986 and early 1987 Iranian offensives that killed hundreds of civilians in Basra were countered with Iraqi strikes on Iranian ships and oil facilities. Iran’s retaliation and

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<sup>85</sup> Fredman, 539; Hiltermann 53, 56-58, 63; Marshall 302.

<sup>86</sup> Fredman, 540-541.

use of Scud missiles to destroy ships in the Persian Gulf belonging to Iraq's allies did not please the United States, especially since many Kuwaiti ships were hit. In July 1987, the United States showed its Arab support and placed its flags on Kuwaiti ships. President Reagan furthered the gesture by writing to Saddam to promise, "We are committed to help deal with the negative effects of Iran's intransigent pursuit of war, its threat to the security of the Gulf countries, and its threat to freedom of navigation in the Gulf," as well as continued to fight for Resolution 598 in the United Nations. The end of 1986 marked the moment when Saddam and Iraq were able to fully and effectively integrate chemical weapons use into their battle plans. Prior to the al-Faw campaign Saddam held full control over the poison gas arsenal and his approval was required for each use. After al-Faw, however, the command transferred to Iraqi operational commanders in order to improve flexibility and efficiency. This minor but critical transfer of power explains why the Anfal Campaign was so intense.<sup>87</sup>

So far the United States and international community had requested an end to hostilities through non-binding United Nations Security Council resolutions, condemned the use of poison gas and bombs against civilians, and investigated the use of chemical weapons on soldiers and civilians alike. These soldiers and civilians were national enemies of the pilots dropping the bombs or the artillerymen arcing shells over the border. The change in 1987 separated Iraqi attacks prior to this year which had mainly been against Iranian military members, from those post-1987 attacks targeting Iraqi civilians in Kurdistan.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Hiltermann, 80; Joost, R. Hiltermann, "Halabja: America Didn't Seem to Mind Poison Gas," *New York Times*, January 17, 2003, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/17/opinion/IHT-halabja-america-didnt-seem-to-mind-poison-gas.html?mtref=undefined&gwh=187B629D4A98B49C08C2FF7C23F588E7&gwt=pay>; Richard L. Russell, "Iraq's Chemical Weapons Legacy: What Others Might Learn from Saddam," *Middle East Journal* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 197, accessed February 18, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4330124>; Lin, 3627.

<sup>88</sup> Lin, 3627.

Iran reported the attack on Halabja to the United Nations Security Council on March 18, 1988 and received little to no response from the international community. Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Murphy, did not address the attack in his speech on the war on March 22 and the United States government said nothing except to continue condemning both sides for their use of chemical warfare in the conflict, despite the fact there was no evidence Iran used chemical warfare at Halabja. Seven weeks went by before the United Nations released Resolution 612 on May 9, 1988. This resolution condemned the continued use of chemical warfare and again asked each belligerent to comply with the 1925 Geneva Protocol, never explicitly explaining who was at fault for Halabja. The United States supported the resolution, but expressed their continued displeasure with *both* nations' use of chemical weapons, implying Iran also had a role to play in the March 16 attack. David Ottoway's 1988 *New York Times* article, however, explained the "evidence collected by U.S. intelligence agencies of purported Iranian chemical warfare use was far less convincing than the startling evidence of Iraqi chemical attacks provided by television cameras that filmed scores of dead Iraqi Kurds in the northern Iraqi border town of Halabja." This attack differed from previous chemical attacks because Iran immediately allowed western reporters onto the scene to witness the rotting bodies and confirm the use of chemical weapons. The media's photographs brought the horrors of poison gas into the homes of families around the world. Zach Fredman, author of the article "Shoring Up Iraq, 1983 to 1990: Washington and the Chemical Weapons Controversy" explains, "Americans and other Westerners had seen headlines about Iraqi chemical weapons use from time to time, but they never before saw photographs and

videos of dead Kurdish women and children.” Because of this media frenzy the United States condemned Iraq for the attack, but also made a point to publicize Iran’s supposed role.<sup>89</sup>

The United States State Department’s response to the Halabja attack epitomized their stance in regards to the war. Department of State spokesman Charles Redman told the world there were “indications that Iran may have also used chemical artillery shells in the fighting” but offered no evidence. Richard Murphy, the Assistant Secretary of State further discussed the Kurdish issue with Iraq and reaffirmed the President’s commitment to Iraq and the United States’ refusal to “support any individuals or groups who threaten Iraq’s unity and territorial integrity.” The Department instructed its members to respond to any questions with the line, “The U.S. believes that both Iraq and Iran used chemical weapons in the fighting around Halabja.” And, if pressed for any further information to say, “While we have concluded there was Iranian use, we cannot discuss the information from which we have drawn our conclusion.” These findings show the accusation of Iran was simply a diplomatic scheme to help Iraq avoid sole international condemnation. Iraq also found a way to put a turn on the international view of chemical weapons in the war. During the second Anfal campaign in the Zerda Mountains on March 30, 1988 the mustard and nerve gases blew back into Iraqi formations injuring multiple soldiers. Iraq paraded these victims around to draw the attention of the United Nations and accuse Iran of being at fault for the attack. To the common man, knowledge that both nations had victims of chemical warfare may appear as if both sides had used poison gas, when in truth there was only

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<sup>89</sup> David B. Ottoway, “U.S. Decries Iraqi Use of Chemical Weapons,” *Washington Post*, March 24, 1988, accessed February 23, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/03/24/us-decries-iraqi-use-of-chemical-weapons/4421ebe8-df59-477d-882b-7d381f3a1868/?utm\\_term=.2a014d9cc6f8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/03/24/us-decries-iraqi-use-of-chemical-weapons/4421ebe8-df59-477d-882b-7d381f3a1868/?utm_term=.2a014d9cc6f8); Lin, 3628-3629; “Summary of Intelligence Reporting on CW Use at Halabja, Iraq 16 MAR 1988,” March 24, 1988, [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0001115797.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001115797.pdf).

hard evidence for one side. Historian Hiltermann explains, “In the final analysis the only evidence we have for the convenient claim that Iran used chemical weapons during the war is that the US government, with all its intelligence capabilities and diplomatic weight, said so. And the antipathy for Iran was such that no one cared to question that statement”<sup>90</sup>

As expected, some members of the United States government opposed this stance of inaction and proposed to place sanctions on Iraq to keep them from using illegal weaponry. These sanctions proposed and approved in Senate Resolution 408 in April 1988 explicitly blamed Iraq for its use of chemical weapons and called for the end of chemical exportation to countries seeking to develop chemical weapons, the prevention of Iranian development of chemical weapons, and the pursuit of a ban on the production, use, or transfer of chemical weapons. This stance taken by the Senate differs starkly from the one held in 1984 when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported on the Iran-Iraq war and failed to mention any use of chemical weapons by Iraq. The new stance continued after the September attacks with the Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988. This act would prevent the United States from loaning any money, selling any military equipment or banned exports, or extending credit to Iraq, and prohibited the importation of oil from Iraq. Although the Reagan White House killed this bill, it showed that some members of the government opposed the United States’ policy towards the Iran-Iraq War and favored the application of sanctions on Baghdad in hopes that it would end the genocide. Those that opposed the bill, such as the State Department represented by Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Peter Burleigh, argued, “We do not believe sanctions now would bring us closer to the objective we share with this committee of ending chemical weapons use by Iraq once and for all.” He continued, “We believe that the

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<sup>90</sup> Fredman, 543-544; Hiltermann, 126-127, 171-174, 182.



passage of this legislation now would undercut our efforts with Iraq and damage US exporters without furthering the goal of ending use by Iraq of chemical weapons.” His views were shared by the President, and the United States allowed Saddam’s regime to continue without economic punishment.<sup>91</sup>

Having only been delivered a slap on the hand by the United States, Saddam was given a final opportunity to accomplish his goals. He launched the Tawakalna ala Allah (Trust in God) campaigns in the south near Fish Lake and continued the Anfal campaign in Kurdistan to force the Iranians to accept the ceasefire. Six more Anfal campaigns ravaged the rural north and each began with a day of chemical attacks designed to flush out rebel Kurdish forces living in the mountains. The fleeing rebels were caught by Iraqi troops, sent to holding centers, and transported to the Popular Army base at Topzawa just outside of Kirkuk for separation and execution. Those not executed were sent to the Nugrat Salman prison in the desert near Samawa in southern Iraq. Here a lack of food and medical care resulted in the deaths of many more. Historian Mike Tucker reveals the stories of Kurdish prisoners in camps such as Nugrat Salman. Halima Mohsen, a woman taken during the Gizi village massacre in August 1988 recalls how the Iraqis “held guns on us” and “beat our men with steel cables, with wooden clubs, with leather whips, and with steel chains.” Those that survived were released on September 6 when an

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<sup>91</sup> A Resolution to Condemn the Use of Chemical Weapons by Iraq and Urge the President to Continue Applying Diplomatic Pressure to Prevent their Further Use, and Urge the Administration to Step Up Efforts to Achieve an International Ban on Chemical Weapons, S. Res. 408, 100<sup>th</sup> Cong, April 12, 1988, accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/senate-resolution/408>; US Congress. House. Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988. H. Res. 5271. 100<sup>th</sup> Cong. September 9, 1988. Accessed March 14, 2019. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/5271>; Thomas L. McNaughter, “Ballistic Missiles and Chemical Weapons: The Legacy of the Iran-Iraq War,” *International Security* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 23, accessed February 18, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2538864>.

amnesty was reached to end the Anfal campaigns. Very few reports of these actions reached the international community. United States DIA analyst Rick Francona who worked as the Iraqi Military Intelligence liaison claimed to have never heard about the Anfal campaign while he was there. United States ambassador to Iraq David Newton explained it differently, “We *did* know that villages were being razed and that people were being taken to the desert. We had the impression they were being executed [...] What nobody realized at the time was the scale of the campaign.”<sup>92</sup>

The United States’ stance on the attack at Halabja remained largely indifferent due to what appeared to be mixed understandings of events within Washington. Halabja was simply an event that happened within an ally’s borders that Washington chose to forget. Once Iran accepted the ceasefire and the war officially ended, the United States could more publically condemn Saddam Hussein’s tactics, but it was too little too late. The issue remained under the rug until the 1991 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. All of a sudden, the political and military goals of Saddam’s regime did not align with the United States’. “Thus,” as Dr. Sharat G. Lin writes in his article titled “Lying about Halabja: Justifying the Invasion of Iraq,” “when it did not suit US policy in the Gulf, the Halabja incident was virtually ignored. But as soon as Iraq fell out of favor, Halabja, al-Anfal, and unilateral Iraqi chemical weapons use suddenly became serious human rights concerns.” Washington used these gas attacks from the war to turn their backs on Saddam and fight to help the Kuwaitis being invaded. Even Congress was finally able to cut \$700 million in loan guarantees to Iraq through a bill passed on July 27, 1990.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Hiltermann, 128-133, 136-138; Razoux, 451; Mike Tucker, *Hell is Over: Voices of the Kurds After Saddam*, (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2004), 53-55.

<sup>93</sup> Fredman, 548; Lin, 3630.

After the Gulf War, the attacks were again forgotten for almost a decade. The issue was not brought up until March 16, 2000 when the United States State Department spokesman, James Rubin, articulated, “We are working towards the day when those ultimately responsible for the decision to order the poison gas bombardment of Halabja can be brought to justice before an international tribunal, in a free and democratic Iraq, or wherever they may be found.” Even after September 11, 2001 Washington needed more justification to enter the Middle East and again, Halabja became a primary reason. On March 13, 2003 the Department of State issued a leaflet titled “Saddam’s Chemical Weapons Campaign: Halabja, March 16, 1988.” This document labeled Saddam as the “first world leader in modern times to have brutally used chemical weapons against his own people” and that “his goals were to systematically terrorize and exterminate the Kurdish population in northern Iraq, to silence his critics, and to test the effects of his chemical and biological weapons. Hussein launched chemical weapons attacks against 40 Kurdish villages and thousands of innocent civilians in 1987-88, using them as testing grounds.” This is quite a different political stance from the one taken by Washington in 1984, 1986, or even directly after the Anfal Campaign in 1988. As Dr. Lin declared, “Only when it came to a desperate search for pretexts to invade Iraq in 2003 did Halabja become a star – the star whose resurrected massacre would become the rallying cry for a new war on Iraq without end.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Lin, 3625, 3630-3631; Stephen C. Pelletiere, “A War Crime or an Act of War?” *New York Times*, January 31, 2003, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/31/opinion/a-war-crime-or-an-act-of-war.html>.

## EPILOGUE

The Tawakalna ala Allah operation launched by Iraq in May 1988 pushed Pasdaran forces back to the border. Saddam Hussein managed to restore relations with Jalal Talabani and his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan as well as with Masoud Barzani and the Kurdistan Democratic Party. In exchange for exclusively targeting Iranian troops in Kurdistan, the two Kurds agreed to quit expanding in the region. Saddam's goal was to drive Iran out of Iraq and he was willing to negotiate peacefully in order to do so. Tawakalna ala Allah 2 at the Majnoon Islands and Hoveyze Marshes began a month later and resulted in a three-day battle and complete return of territory to Iraq. The Iranians had lost all motivation. By the time Saddam launched Tawakalna ala Allah 3 the Iraqis had full control, needing just one day to take the city of Dehloran and the oil fields on the Iranian side of the border. Baghdad now held all the cards and demanded the withdrawal of any remaining Iranian troops from Iraqi Kurdistan. If his demands were not met, Saddam planned to attack the Iranian oil-city of Ahwaz. On July 14 and July 15 Iranian leaders decided to cede to his requests in order to end the war. The Ayatollah Khomeini could not attend the meeting for health-related reasons but took responsibility for the decision to end the war in order to protect the political careers of Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei. On July 15 Rafsanjani withdrew all troops from Kurdistan and two days later Saddam Hussein listed his five conditions for peace: 1) direct negotiations between the two parties, 2) an immediate start to the United Nations cleanup of the Shatt al-Arab, 3) a guarantee of free navigation in the Persian Gulf for Iraq, 4) an end to Iranian attacks on maritime traffic, and 5) a direct prisoner exchange.<sup>95</sup>

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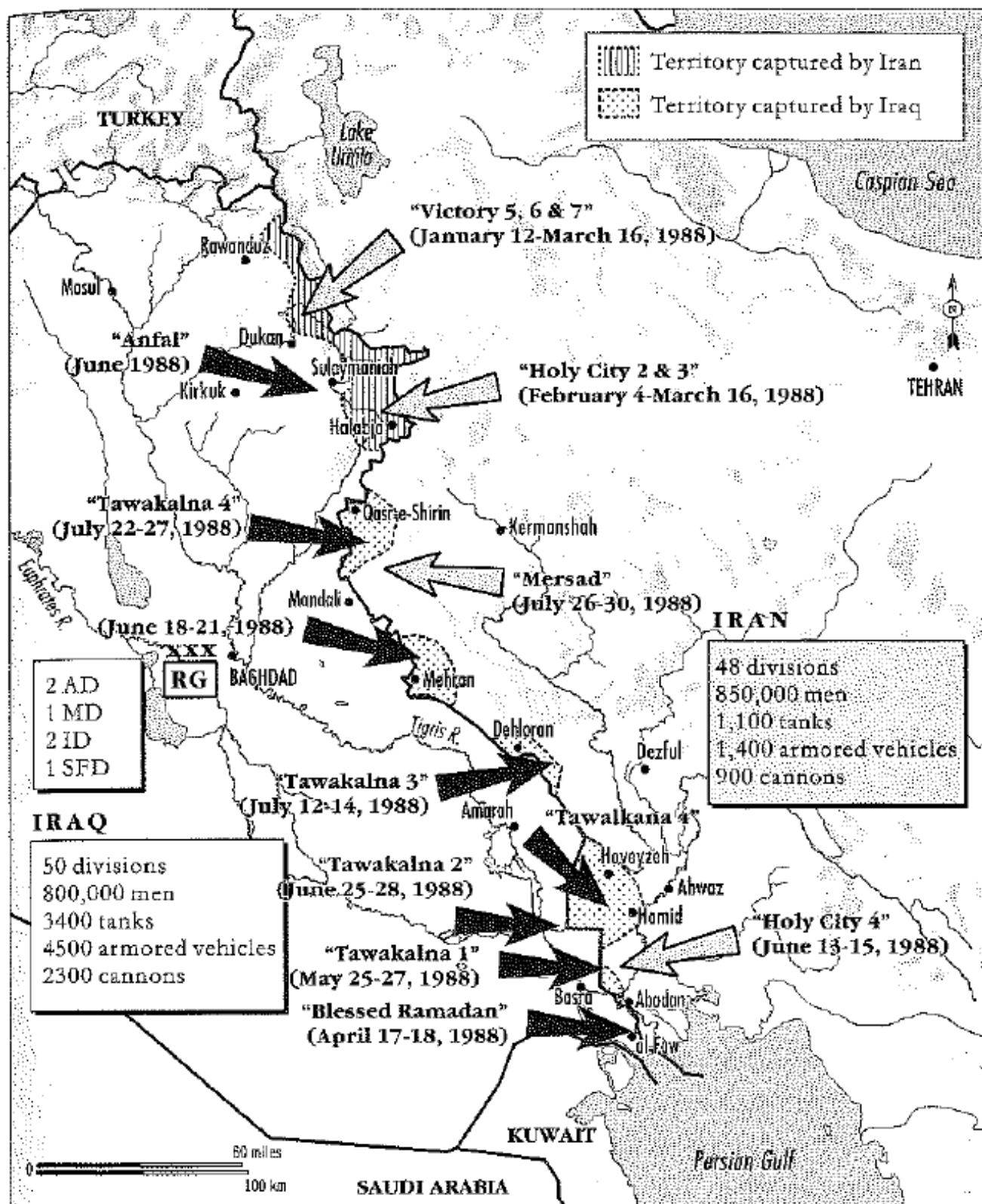
<sup>95</sup> Razoux, 451-455, 463-464.

On the same day Saddam pulled his troops back to the border and Ali Khamenei sent word to the United Nations accepting Resolution 598 and stating the ceasefire would go into effect one month later. Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar tried to lead negotiations between the two nations in New York City; however, Iran refused to recognize the Iraqi regime's legitimacy. In turn, Saddam initiated Tawakalna ala Allah 4 on July 22 and took thirty miles of Iranian territory and eight thousand prisoners near Qasr-e-Shirin and Hoveyzeh. Finally, Iraqi Tariq Aziz and Iranian Ali Akbar Velayati met in New York with the Secretary General on July 26. Again, the belligerents had issues, this time relating to direct negotiations, the validity of the Algiers Agreement, and the prisoner exchange as both sides' prisoners did not want to return to their country for fear of punishment. Once again, Saddam went on the offensive. Operation Eternal Light began that same day on the road to Kermanshah but was stalled by an Iranian counterattack. Still, Iraqi raids continued until Iran finally accepted direct negotiations on August 6, 1988. Here, Saddam agreed to a ceasefire and recognized the Algiers Agreement. The following day Iran confirmed the ceasefire, accepted negotiations, and agreed to the right of free passage on the Shatt al-Arab. Combat ended and on August 20 the ceasefire went into effect. Shortly after, a peacekeeping force of three hundred fifty observers from twenty-six countries, excluding Arab nations and those on the Security Council, arrived to monitor the border for the United Nations.<sup>96</sup>

The war slowly but surely came to a close. The two belligerent's foreign ministers met on August 24 in Geneva, the Anfal campaigns ended on September 3, and Iran reestablished diplomatic relations with regional and European nations. Both nations rebuilt their oil facilities and began a twenty-one-month prisoner exchange at the end of November. The war officially

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<sup>96</sup> Razoux, 464-468.



Iran-Iraq Front in 1988<sup>97</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Razoux, 453.

ended when Iraq withdrew its last troops from Iran almost two years later on August 20, 1990, just eighteen days after it invaded Kuwait and began the Gulf War.<sup>98</sup>

The use of chemical warfare by Iraq continued into the Gulf War, and it was not until three years later that the international community decided to restructure the rules surrounding chemical weapons. The 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention dictated the constraints on chemical weapons development, production, stockpiling, trade, and use. It became effective in April 1997 and augmented the Geneva Protocol of 1925. It has been the most recent international document regarding chemical warfare.<sup>99</sup>

After the Gulf War in 1991, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 687, passed under Chapter Seven, required Iraq to destroy all chemical weapons, stockpiles, and facilities; provide locations for these facilities; and allow a United Nations Special Commission to inspect them. Between 1991 and 1998 the Commission discovered and removed 48 Scud missiles, 38,000 chemical weapons munitions, 690 tons of chemical agents, and 3,000 tons of chemical weapons precursors. The Commission was confident the majority of Iraq's chemical warfare program had been eliminated, but Iraq's lack of cooperation, surprising production of VX gas, and unaccounted-for chemical precursors left questions unanswered. When inspections ended after 1998, Iraq and Saddam immediately returned to producing mustard, sarin, cyclosarin, and VX gas. In 2001, behind a push from Britain and the United States, the Security Council approved Resolution 1441 under Chapter Seven because Iraq had not cooperated with the Special Commission and their inspections. Consequently, the inspections were renewed in late November 2002 and carried out by the specially created United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC). Even after these inspections the United States and

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<sup>98</sup> Razoux, 474-477.

<sup>99</sup> Hiltermann, 16.

Britain did not believe Iraq was being truthful about their Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programs and wanted another, more forceful resolution. United Nations members like France, Germany, and Russia however, disagreed, and wanted to follow through with UNMOVIC. The United States and Britain, in turn, launched Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 19, 2003 to end Saddam Hussein's regime and eliminate his WMD threat.<sup>100</sup>

United States forces captured Saddam Hussein at the end of 2003 and an Iraqi High Tribunal was created by the interim government to try the former dictator for his crimes. Saddam was first tried for his role in the torture and killing of 148 men and boys as part of the Dujail massacre in 1982. The attack followed a failed assassination attempt on Saddam's life and resulted in the death of a horrific number of Shi'ites from the opposing political party, the Dawa Party. His second (of seven charges against him) related to the Anfal campaign. Also tried for their crimes against the Kurds were Ali Hassan al-Majid (Chemical Ali; director of the Ba'athist Party's Northern Bureau), Sultan Hashem Ahmed (military commander), Sabir Abdul Aziz al-Duri (Director of Military Intelligence), Hussein Rashid al-Tikriti (Deputy Director of Military Operations), Tahir Tawfiq al-Ani (the Governor of Mosul), and Farhan Mutlak al-Jabouri (the Head of Military Intelligence in Northern Iraq). All of these men were charged with crimes against humanity, but Saddam and Ali were also charged with genocide. The trial, in order to sentence these two men for genocidal crimes, had to show they "killed the Kurds because they *were* Kurds, not because they were assisting Iraq's enemy during the war."

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<sup>100</sup> Coleman, 125-128; "Iraq's Chemical Warfare Program," Central Intelligence Agency, last modified April 23, 2007, accessed March 13, 2019, [https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq\\_wmd\\_2004/chap5.html#sect0](https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/chap5.html#sect0); "Resolution 687 (1991)," United Nations Security Council, April 3, 1991, accessed February 18, 2019, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/687>; "Resolution 1441 (2002)," United Nations Security Council, November 8, 2002, accessed February 20, 2019, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1441>.



Additionally, the Iraqi High Tribunal did not need to be convinced of the men's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, but rather just be satisfied with the evidence provided in order to prosecute them.<sup>101</sup>

In early November, Saddam was convicted of his crimes in the Dujail trial and sentenced to death. His appeal was rejected on December 26, 2006 and his sentence was upheld. His execution had to occur within the next thirty days. The Anfal Trial had begun on August 21, 2006 and was only halfway complete by this time. Kurdish witnesses had poured forth to testify and share their stories of the horrors at the Nugrat Salman prison camp, the torture and rape of prisoners, the atrocities experienced in their home cities, the malnutrition and disease in detention centers, and the mass murder of families later placed in mass graves. By the time of Saddam's execution on December 30, 2006 the Anfal verdict had not been reached. Rather than continue the trial posthumously, the Tribunal chose to drop the charges of genocide in the Anfal Trial after his death. While the Tribunal and trial are often criticized for their illegitimacy, bias, and lack of independent international judges, the result allowed Saddam off the hook one last time. The Shi'ites from Dujail may have gotten the justice they deserved, but the Kurds were robbed once again. However, some justice was had when the remaining defendants' verdicts were reached. Chemical Ali, Hashem Ahmed, and Hussein Rashid al-Tikriti faced life sentences in 2007; Farhan Mutlak al-Jubouri and Sabir Abdul-Aziz al-Duri faced life imprisonment; and Tahir Tawfiq al-Ani was exonerated as per the prosecution's request.<sup>102</sup>

The Iran-Iraq War took the lives of 680,000 individuals (180,000 Iraqis and 500,000 Iranians), and wounded and maimed an additional 1.5 million. Eighty-five percent of these were

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<sup>101</sup> Edward Wong, "Saddam Charged with Genocide of Kurds," *New York Times*, April 5, 2006, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/05/world/05iht-saddam.html>; Kelly 235, 237.

<sup>102</sup> Kelly, 235, 237, 239, 242. "'Chemical Ali' Sentenced to Hang," CNN International, June 24, 2007, accessed February 20, 2019, <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/06/24/iraq.ali/index.html>.

soldiers, 12 percent were Kurds, and 3 percent were civilians. All in all, the war cost a total of \$1,100 billion dollars in 1988 dollars. It was characterized by the extensive use of chemical weapons which included 19,500 chemical bombs, over 54,000 chemical artillery shells, and 27,000 short-range chemical-filled rockets, all from the Iraqi side. Within these the regime loaded 1,800 tons of mustard gas, 140 tons of tabun, and more than 600 tons of sarin. In turn, the use of these weapons during the Anfal campaign resulted in the deaths of 50,000 to 100,000 Kurds, the resettlement of 1.5 million Kurds, and the forced flight of 60,000 Kurdish refugees to Turkey. It is clear this war was horrifically unique. This is a point that should not be overlooked for it not only allows one to understand why Saddam made the decisions he did, but also how the United States and United Nations helped him do so.<sup>103</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter One, the rich and potent history of chemical warfare reaches back to the First World War and extends into modern battlefields as seen in present-day Syria. Throughout this timeline five major instances of confirmed chemical weapons use stand out: the Italo-Ethiopian War, Sino-Japanese War, Egyptian-Yemen War, Soviet-Afghan War, and the Iran-Iraq War. What makes this last conflict different and worthy of this study is the reason for using those chemical weapons.

In his article, “Chemical Warfare: Act of Intimidation or Desperation,” author Robert Mandel asks three main questions to determine the how appropriate the use of chemical weapons was in these five conflicts. Do leaders voluntarily choose to use chemical weapons or have they been forced into using them? Are leaders using chemical weapons because they terrorize the population or because they can achieve strategic goals without causing collateral damage to cities, property, or the landscape? Do leaders use chemical weapons early or late in the conflict

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<sup>103</sup> Kelly, 235; Razoux, 471-472; Russell, 194.

and do they use the technology as a last resort when all other available weapons have been exhausted? The answers to these questions explain how the Iran-Iraq War was different and how Saddam's use of chemical weaponry can be more easily understood considering the circumstances.<sup>104</sup>

The Italians utilized chemical weapons a year into their war with Ethiopia (1935) and dropped tear gas grenades and barrels of mustard gas behind enemy lines in order to intimidate Ethiopian troops. Their offensive use was intended to win the war before the League of Nations' sanctions implemented as a result of the Geneva Protocol violation could permanently hurt the economy. In sum, the Italians used chemical weapons offensively and early in the war when they were not in danger of losing, and before they had exhausted other options, like conventional bombings. Japan utilized chemical weapons eleven days after their war with China began in 1937 in order to instill terror and weaken the morale of unprepared Chinese soldiers. Again, chemical weapons were used offensively before conventional methods had been tried. The Japanese began the attacks almost immediately after the war commenced and at a point where losing the war was not a threat. In the mid-twentieth century, Egypt initiated chemical warfare against Yemeni troops just months into the war through phosgene and mustard bombs, shells, and landmines. Egypt's experimental use quickly turned into an offensive terror. It was not used as a last resort as other methods of warfare were still available. The Soviets even used chemical warfare prior to their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The use of phosgene, tabun, and VX gas through bombing, aerial spraying, rockets, and landmines resulted in the intimidation of Afghan troops. The USSR was militarily superior to Afghanistan and had no need to use chemical

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<sup>104</sup> Robert Mandel, "Chemical Warfare: Act of Intimidation or Desperation?" *Armed Sources & Society* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 187-189, accessed February 19, 2019, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=5f8ac396-494f-47c1-b486-52adeaeae38b%40sessionmgr103>.

weapons. Their use did not even result in the end of the war. The four examples described here share the same characteristics: they are offensive-minded uses of chemical weapons early on in conflict before other conventional approaches to war were tried or exhausted and while the aggressor had no need to worry about losing the war.<sup>105</sup>

The Iran-Iraq War differs almost entirely. The war began in September 1980 as the militarily superior Iraq invaded Iran who dominated in terms of manpower. Despite Iraq's preparedness to end the war shortly after their offensive stalled, Iran took the initiative and continued the war for an additional six years. Iran's human wave attacks and offensive push into Iraqi territory led Saddam to implement chemical weapons in 1983. From tear gas in 1983 to mustard gas and tabun gas in 1984 to an increased use of these and other nerve agents until 1988, Iraq managed to defend its territory and drive back the Iranians. Iraq and Saddam Hussein did not utilize chemical weapons offensively during their invasion in 1980-82. The use of these weapons began when Iraq took up a defensive posture and after conventional bombings and warfare methods failed to stop Iranian human wave attacks. These conventional methods were, by no means, exhausted, but one may argue that the use of chemical weapons was a last resort option for Saddam in his war against Iran. Had he not used chemical weapons, Iran may have pushed the final few miles to Basra in 1984, 1985, 1986, or 1987 or Baghdad at many times during the war as Tehran tried to cut off the highway connecting the two cities but succumbed to poison gas attacks at places like the Majnoon Islands (1984), Mandali in 1986, or Sumer and Mehran in 1987.<sup>106</sup>

It is important to note at no point in this argument is the use of chemical weapons condoned. Saddam Hussein's poison gas attacks are a clear violation of the 1925 Geneva

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<sup>105</sup> Mandel, 192-201.

<sup>106</sup> Mandel 201- 203.

Protocol and a heinous crime against humanity, specifically the attacks against innocent Iranian and Iraqi civilians. The argument of Saddam's use of poison gas as a last resort only applies to the Iran-Iraq War as an international conflict. This time the argument excludes the internal fight against the Kurds that resulted in the attack on Halabja in 1988. The use of chemical weapons in that situation is and will forever be condemned as genocide by the author of this thesis. Also deserving of condemnation is the inaction of the United States who turned a blind eye to Saddam's continued use of chemical weapons that encouraged him to resort to the method to solve all conflicts, even internal ones. The United Nations Security Council is also to blame as it consistently adopted non-binding resolutions under Chapter Six of the United Nations Charter when Chapter Seven was an option that would have brought about the desired ceasefire much more efficiently. The European powers and other nations around the globe that sold Baghdad the precursors to the chemical weapons he utilized throughout the war are also not free from criticism. Finally, Tehran and the Ayatollah Khomeini must take responsibility for the continuation of the war, the human-wave attacks that resulted in the need for a new response from Iraq, the stubborn and unrealistic demands sent to Baghdad, and the refusal to accept any ceasefire unless those demands were met.

For eight years, Saddam attempted to end the war, but declined Iran's demands out of pride. For eight years, Tehran refused to accept UN and Saddam-led ceasefires, and continued to raise the death toll through aggressive offensives. For eight years the United Nations failed to effectively regulate international conflict. For eight years the United States made poor decisions in regards to the war, often protecting their own backs rather than performing their job as a permanent member of the Security Council. For these reasons it is easier to understand why Saddam chose to use chemical weapons in the first place, why he believed he had the green light

to continue their use, why he grew accustomed to using the method to solve his problems, and why he gained the confidence to invade Kuwait. Again, these actions are not condoned, however, through these chapters it is hoped the reader has been able to take into account all of the moving pieces behind the leaders' decisions. Although the war ended with a ceasefire and return to ante bellum status, and may appear to have been inconsequential, the lessons learned by the international community have incredible military, diplomatic, and humanitarian impacts.

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